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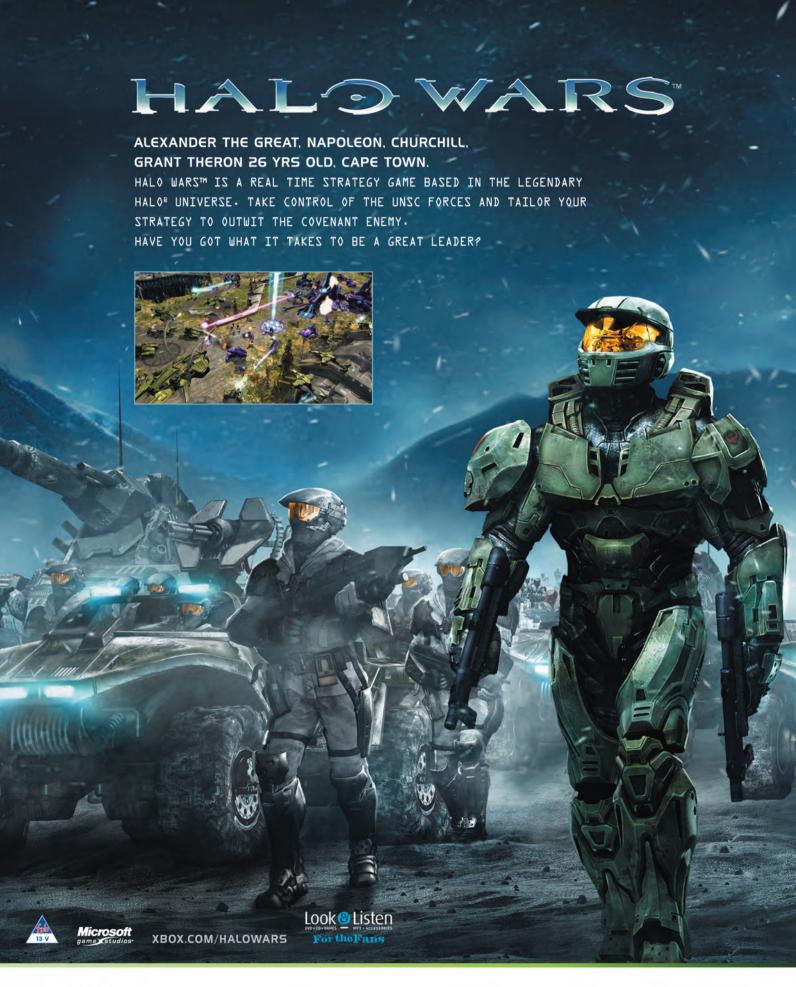
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RECESSION REJECTION

OUR DISTRIBUTION COMPANY REPORTED that the January issue of NAG was our bestselling issue ever. More people are now reading NAG than ever before. So, welcome to all the new faces. I'll get to learn your names during the course of the year; but for now, can you please write your name on a sticker and attach it to your forehead. It's interesting that most other magazines are reporting a drop in readership, but NAG and a few others (Popular Mechanics, for example) are reporting an increase. From the May or June issue, we'll be printing more magazines to address demand. It must be true what they say about the videogame industry being recession proof..

To be honest, the world economic issues have affected us a little: some of our advertisers have suspended all their first-quarter advertising. It doesn't just affect us, but publications in every other country. The result of this: a smaller magazine (in terms of pages). The actual gaming content hasn't changed much, but we've temporarily suspended non-gaming content such as the movie section. This has been interesting, because in the trimming process, we're producing a leaner magazine that's more strictly gaming focused – never a bad thing. End of the day, I think the benefit is more rock and roll content and cutting away all the superfluous fat and fluff. Hang in there, things will improve soon, and we'll go back to our usual 132 pages of glory. I was advised not to talk about this in the magazine, but hey, you can't go wrong if you never lie, can you?;)

DEMAND YOUR NAG...

For those of you who don't get NAG on 'release' day (this should always be the last Thursday of the month), do this: complain. Ask the shop manager where the magazine is. Make sure it's the manager or owner and not some minimum wage, only-herebecause-I-have-to-be-and-my-life-sucks, so-why-should-I-care-or-help-you-type person. If ten people are asking for NAG, then the people in charge will pay special attention to it and make sure they don't have to listen to angry gamers ever again. I mean, wouldn't you?;) Then, for those places in South Africa that don't stock the magazine - demand it. Ask the store manager why he or she doesn't stock NAG. If they give you any PONIESPONIES, let me know (send mail to letters@nag.co.za). The purpose of this exercise is to ensure that when we do increase our print run, the magazines will go to the right places.

SURVEY RESULTS AND APRIL (OUR BIRTHDAY ISSUE)

First, the bad news: the price of the magazine will be going up by R3 to R42. I've never been a fan of the '95c idea'. This is where companies try to make something appear cheaper by lobbing off a whole 5c - lame. It's been a very long time since we increased the price of NAG (way back in April 2005 in fact – four whole years ago!). That issue of NAG featured a Call of Duty 2 preview and the big review was KotOR II. Time certainly does fly. Sorry about the increase, but times are tough as they say.;) The good news is that April represents our makeover issue, and based on the survey (see below), we'll remake the magazine into what the majority of our readers are looking for.

Onto the survey. All the results are in but too late for this issue. In April, we'll share the statistics with you as well as a few of the more flattering comments we received. In total, a massive 1,716 surveys were received, representing around 7-8% of our total readership. This is an unprecedented response to something like this. Most companies usually only get a .05-1% return. So thanks for the input and hopefully we'll make NAG an even better magazine. The prize winners will also be announced in the next issue, so look out for that. The April issue is also our eleventh birthday issue and our annual redesign. We're giving away some cool stuff and the next issue also represents a kick off into 2009. It's been very dry these last few months, but all the big stuff is starting to drop now. Make sure you get your copy.

RAGE [2 10 09]

Yes, we're already working hard on rAge 2009 - it's the seven-year itch version of rAge. Seven years - has it been that long? Anyway, enjoy the video of rAge 2008 on the DVD this month. It's a little late because of the December holidays and some editing backwards and forwards. Enjoy and remember the date 2 October 2009 - this is when gaming nirvana begins. We have some big stuff lined up already. I can't talk about it, but it will be cool.

Later

Michael James [Editor]





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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM: Andrew

SUBJECT: Freedom - Good or Bad?

KAYI KNOW I am going to get blown out of the water here for stating this but in my humble opinion most games these days offer too much freedom. Go anywhere, do anything, gay/straight/ do all these things but only for a limited amount of time. Basically the main reason for playing a certain game is to progress the story. You want to know what happens next so you complete a certain amount of tasks, be it destroying the enemy's base or lining up a number of certain coloured jewels. Do the deed and get rewarded with a little more of the story line and continue until the last boss/level/ reactor has been successfully dealt with and we sit back to watch the last bit of the story unfold before us and feel that extreme sense of accomplishment knowing that we have completed a game after spending many hours in front of our screen.

However recently while playing Fallout 3 and loving every second of it, I was happily playing along and I came to a certain part (I won't elaborate so as not to spoil this for anyone playing this gem of a game) and next thing I know, the end staring at my monitor and wondering what happened. See I knew that I still had so much more to do in this game. Partially because I had some quests still remaining on my beloved 'Pip-Boy' and partially because I had been reading on certain forums about the quests other people were playing and I had not come close to getting to everything. I blame this on the developers allowing the player too much freedom to roam around which is great but without using a walkthrough there is no chance of completing this game 100%. I honestly think I only experienced around 60% of this game and I feel kind of cheated. Sure I probably will play through again sometime, but that will have to wait for a long while as I have other time consuming activities and only managed to get game time in because of December holidays.

I guess I like structure. I like to be guided. I don't want to have to spend hours searching for something that might add to a game. I guess these days trying to hold down a job, a wife/girlfriend,

socialize and still have time to get some game time in does factor in to this as I'm sure if I was younger and still at school I might have that extra spare time to wonder around a virtual landscape searching for extra goodies to discover. However, if I was that young, I wouldn't or should not be playing a R18 title such as Fallout 3.

I know I have only mentioned Fallout 3 but this other titles I have played and I tend to get bored quickly with titles like these. Am I the only person who feels this way or are there other gamers out there that feel a bit more guidance is in order to stop the player treading too far off the beaten path and making sure that when those end credits roll a gamer can sit back and relish the moment, content in the knowledge that he/she has finished the entire game? Oh, and by the way thanks for a great magazine every month guys.

You're not going to get blown out of the water. In fact, come aboard and have a cup of tuna tea. I have a confession to make. I feel pretty much the same way. Open world games and the idea of all that space to explore is always very appealing, but for the wrong reasons. Developer logic dictates that if a game takes more than 20 hours to complete, it means value. What they forget is all the pointless padding in between the good bits that they force players to endure. As a different kind of example, there's a game coming out soon called Borderlands - it'll offer players over 500,000 different types of weapons! If you do the maths, and figure that it'll take you about five minutes to test fire each one, you're looking at just under five years of solid playing just to try them all out. So, is this something to get excited about or not? If a game demands one hundred hours of my time, I'm going to run in the opposite direction. I like my gaming action in short, intense doses because I also have a busy life. Of course, this perspective differs depending on how old you are. Generally speaking, young gamers have more time to play games, but have limited budgets. Older gamers have less time, but can afford to buy two or three games a month. This is an interesting point to debate. So, send in your opinions (the usual address) and let's see what we get. Ed.





The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by Megarom. The winner receives two games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch.

IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158 Cyber mail: letters@tidemedia.co.za Important: Include your details when mailing us, otherwise how will you ever get your prize if you win..

FROM: Dennis

SUBJECT: Sound in games

11 I'VE DECIDED TO GO and study sound engineering, ■after which I'm going to apply for a job at Valve so we can rectify a huge flaw in Valve games. Let's step back a few years. Remember when Doom 3 and Half Life 2 hit our shores, everyone was talking about these games and which one was the better one, to me it was Doom, but let me explain why. Both had awesome graphics and both had great gameplay, but graphics can only give you so much satisfaction. In Half Life all the guns sounded like peashooters... I mean none of the guns felt like they did any damage. In Doom on the other hand even the pistol had a bad ass freaking roar

when slicing down enemies. It made the gameplay so much more rewarding. Soldier of Fortune also had guns that sound like automatic rocket launchers which made it fun to play (even if it was only fun for about 40 minutes or sol. My point is that one of the aspects that would make Valve games more rewarding is the way they make their guns sound, but it doesn't only apply to Valve, a lot of other developers could benefit from better sound. One day people will hopefully get over this plethora of graphics and say: 'damn that game sounds fun to play!'"

Hello, Dennis! Hello, I can't hear you. Hello? If you're still there, here's a tip: when you do apply for the

Valve job, don't tell them that their games suck. But seriously, good luck and if you do land the job, I want you to subliminally include a recording of 'NAG rules' in Half-Life 3.:1 Fd

FROM: Werner

SUBJECT: Time = money

11 HAVE RECENTLY BEEN THINKING about the cost of games, especially games that you finish in +/- 3 hours and still pay R300 to R350 and I'm mostly talking about PC games, not even to mention PlayStation 3 or Xbox 360 games. Take for instance Crysis Warhead. How does a price tag of about R300 justify a game that you can finish in 3 hours or maybe even less? I have no idea who is responsible for determining the actual price of a game or what criteria are being used to determine the selling value, but maybe I can suggest that they should start and try to put games into different categories and price them according to each category. These categories can include game length, replay value, originality and of course quality of graphics. For instance, take a game like Oblivion or Fallout 3 which are both open ended games. I would gladly pay R350 or even R500 for those games, since you will get your full money's worth just because of the sheer gaming hours they devour, fantastic looks and their absolute replay value. Some strategy, racing and sport games would also justify a + R300 price tag, because you can play them over and over again and most of the time they even look good, but of course there are always exceptions. Although shooters like Call of Duty 4 and Gears of War, to name just a few, are relatively short games, they are so action packed and simply put, darn good, I wouldn't need much convincing spending three or four buffaloes on them. I'm sure that by following the above mentioned suggestion, developers will try harder to make games even better and longer lasting (time wise of course), since they won't get a proper price for a mediocre or shoddy game. There are now more factors to be reckoned with and things to think long and hard about, before throwing a guick fix for a guick buck on the market and it will so inspire them to put the effort in to fetch a higher price. I know it will take a lot of time and effort doing things this way and yes, I know, it does sound stupid, ridiculous and a bit like a load of well work but hev at least I came up with some chicken scratch...'

I've been getting a lot of mail this month about value and gaming (must have something to do with this pesky recession). Regardless, it is interesting that you equate value with how long a game takes to play, whereas other people prefer a shorter, but more intense experience. It's going to be difficult developing a system like the one you describe... but if it's out there you never know. Ed

FROM: Christo

SUBJECT: Horrific News

11 I UH, SAW something very disturbing in the February issue. You stated that there are, allegedly, non-gaming staff members at NAG. Shocking. Just...shocking."

We're trying to get rid of them. ;) The problem with everyone being gamers is that nothing will ever get done. Ed.

FROM: Cilliers

SUBJECT: The time has come... indeed

***** READ THE ARTICLE BY** Megan (The time has come) with a huge grin on my face. Indeed the time has come for me as well; instead I'm ditching my 360 for a PC. Don't get me wrong I love my Xbox but I just cannot and will not pay the high prices

NAG FAN ARTWORK

This is the best of what we received during the month. If you can insert, use or create a piece of gaming artwork incorporating the NAG logo you might also end up here for your three lines of fame.



Darren Tomkins: "So the January 2009 issue's 3D picture of the NAG logo in the desert came from 3D World Magazine's free content disk. It's called Badlands and the Author' put in the NAG text. It's great when you can use royalty free content for images I just think you should give credit where it's due. Most of the elements in this image were downloaded from www. turbosquid.com and were re-textured and composited in Max." [Thanks for pointing that out. Dear artists, if you're going to 'borrow' things to make great NAG images, we really don't mind. Just credit your sources. Ed.]

The reader who sends in the best NAG fan art each month will receive a copy of Guinness World Record Gamer's Edition 2008



of games. Sure with a PC you get all the frustrating problems like Windows not starting, drivers not working correctly and system requirements but at the end of the day I will rather sit with the trouble then fork out 600 bucks for a game that I can get for half the price on the PC. I have been gaming for over 17 years now, the PC mainly being my platform of choice. Two years ago I felt the same way Megan felt and jumped ship "defecting" to console gaming. I find it ironic that two years after the plunge I come back to the system I grew up on. To end this letter I would just like to say that in some sick twisted weird way, I missed that good old blue screen and trying to figure out why my game won't start even though it played fine an hour ago."

Don't get rid of your Xbox - hang in there. The pricing will come right eventually and don't forget that they have a cracking good range of classics for sale at low prices. For example, by the time you read this magazine you should be able to find Mass Effect and Halo 3 for around R299! Microsoft, you can thank me later.;) Ed.

FROM: Ryan

SUBJECT: Pre-hype Letdown

VERTHE YEAR OR so that I've been collecting NAG, I have noticed that you guys always have the standard cover feature and preview of the game that you hype us all about, but then in the next issue or two, in the review it turns out to be an average or disappointing game. Is this because you overlooked things in the initial content you received? Or is NAG being bribed by the game companies, (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) to over hype a game that they knew was crap before they even released it to get as many sales in before people realised they've been ripped off for a crap game?"

Oops, you caught us... But not for what you think. ;) We are probably guilty of getting excited here and there about upcoming games that we do cover features on. At least when we review them, we're more critical and don't worry – we end up even more disappointed because we've been so close to the game making process. Ed.

ON THE FORUM

QUESTION: What is your favourite indie game and why?

Ruandre: "A Game with a Kitty (http://www.origamihero.com/games.php#1). It's short, sweet, and simple and most importantly: pure platform fun! Cute kitty, too."

FEN1X: "World of Goo: Probably the best game I have ever played under 70MB, its addictive, plays well, looks great and is all round pure awesome. [http://2dboy.com/games.php]"

Kensei: "7 Days a Skeptic (http://www.fullyramblomatic.com/7days/) - Sequel to 5 Days a Stranger and the only adventure to make me panic like a student doing an unprepared for exam."

The_Q?: "Aquaria - (http://www.bit-blot.com/aquaria/) Absolutely stunning visuals. Solid game mechanics that work and not just there as gimmicks – made by two people with the polish of an entire development studio."

Repline: "Master of Defense: Placing towers, and ensuring that all my little peeps are safely tucked away at night... come on... what can beat that? [Http://www.master-of-defense.com]"

Gazza_N: "Iji has got to be my favourite at the moment - nonlinear action platform with RPG elements and a killer soundtrack. (http://www.remar.se/daniel/iji.php)"

oltman: "Fantastic Contraption - it's like the incredible machine for dummies... but with real physics... awesome! [http://www.fantasticcontraption.com/]"

Snake6776: "I've got to say that my favourites are Eets Hunger. It's Emotional (http://www.eetsgame.com) and Gumboy Crazy Adventures (http://www.gumboycrazyadventures.com)"

HAVE YOUR SAY ON THE NAG FORUMS: http://forums.tidemedia.co.za



bytes



NEED FOR SPEED GETS A REBUILD

Prepare for the onslaught – no platform is safe.

ALL PUNS ASIDE, THE Need for Speed series has had a bumpy road. While some titles have redefined the series and broken new ground in the arcade racing genre, others have relied too heavily on the brand and substituted solid gameplay and innovative features for licensed hip hop tracks and customisable bonnet scoops. Thankfully EA seems to have taken notice of the latter occurrence and is looking to not only continue the series, but reinvent the wheel three times over. Will this be enough to salvage the dying brand and keep it out of the scrap heap? After the massive downsizing of primary developer EA Black Box and the stale gameplay plaguing recent releases, it's going to take a hell of a lot more than a couple of facelifts to bring this brand back to life.

As a part of EA's revised business strategy, that is, to pay a bit more attention to all potential revenue platforms including the more casual crowd, the first new *Need for Speed* title we'll see coming from the publisher will be focused squarely on the casual market. EA Montreal's Boogie Studio is taking the reins on *Need for Speed Nitro*, a DS and Wii title that EA assures players will offer them "fast and fun arcade racing" lovingly wrapped up in a "unique visual style". We're told this will be unlike any *NFS* we've seen before and the title is set to keep both veteran arcade racers and casual gamers alike entertained. We're currently entertaining the idea of the *NAG* Miis battling it out in pimped-out Murciélagos down a drift track, though that's just



wishful thinking for the moment.

Next up for the casual crowd is Need for Speed World Online. This free-to-play MMORG, under development by Black Box, will kick off in the Asian markets and will make use of microtransactions to secure revenue. EA's Keith Munro tells "This is not so much a proof of concept – it is a full-fledged launch in a market that we are very ambitious toward. This 'Play 4 Free' action racing game will give Need for Speed fans the most licensed cars, parts and game modes ever in Need for Speed's history." Despite their optimism, it's a classic method of creeping a game into the market if you're not quite sure how it'll be received - which makes perfect sense given the thin financial ice Black Box is treading on.

Understandably, EA isn't giving up on their core gamers just yet. Need for Speed Shift, developed by GT Legends creators Slightly Mad and led by Black Box producer Michael Mann, will take the series far beyond the rubber-burning mechanics of the arcade racers before it and enter a new, physics-heavy realistic approach to the sport of motor car racing. Initial screens look gorgeous, showing a much more sophisticated graphics style and a definite move away from the 'thugluvvin' world of modified street cars.

All-in-all, it's an exciting line-up for the *Need for Speed* series in the coming year – we're genuinely pleased that the series is getting a thorough looking-at and frankly, it's about time.





THE THREAT OF PEACE

If the excitement of the pending release of The Old Republic is just getting too much to handle, perhaps an official webcomic will help quell that hunger until the game arrives. Entitled Star Wars: The Old Republic - Threat of Peace, the comic will be written by BioWare's Rob "Jedi Rob" Chestney, with artwork and all the other bits and pieces (and likely future print publication) to be handled by Dark Horse Books. The Threat of Peace takes readers back three decades from the signing of the Treaty of Coruscant right up to the start of the MMO's storyline. It will likely detail significant plot elements in the game's story and will be a mustread for anyone thinking about picking up the game when it's released. The comic should be up and running by the time you read this, so keep an eye on www. starwarstheoldrepublic.com.



FAR CRY 2 IS SO TOTALLY HARDCORE

Many gamers complained that Far Cry 2 wasn't 'hardcore' enough. For a game that focuses so much on a realistic African setting, using realistic weapons and an incredibly realistic graphics engine, one would perhaps expect a bit more realism in the combat and damage models. Ubisoft hears your cries, dear über-leet gamer, and is preparing for the addition of a hardcore mode for multiplayer games. What gamers can expect is similar to Call of Duty's hardcore mode, meaning increase weapon damage (or decreased health, we never can tell) and the removal of those dead giveaway enemy tags once their brief invulnerability after spawning has expired. There will also be a toggle to search for hardcore games when browsing through the server list. While the game's multiplayer has largely died off from what we can tell, this addition might just be the spark to reignite its popularity.



THE POST-HOLIDAY LULL HAS ended and publishers have begun the next onslaught of game release announcements, and it's all about the sequels. First up we have Rockstar's next project, Red Dead Redemption, to ogle. The follow-up to 2004's Red Dead Revolver, Redemption is a 3rd-person action adventure set in early 20TH century Western badlands of America. Players will be able to explore a large world filled with frontier towns, bandit-friendly mountain passes and all the Western cliché goodness you can imagine.

In a rather odd move, SEGA has announced the development of the *Iron Man 2* game. While that's not entirely unexpected, it might be considered a little strange to begin developing the game before the movie has even begun filming, but who are we to judge? Collaborating closely with Marvel,

SEGA developers are sure they'll be able to deliver a high-quality product that will please fans of both the upcoming film (when they finally settle on their cast, at least) and the Iron Man brand itself. Expect releases across all platforms sometime next year alongside the film.

EA's stables have also been hard at work; the megapublisher has announced the sequels to both Mass Effect and Bad Company. Both titles are scheduled for release in the fourth quarter of this year. Details are still a little scant at the moment, but EA has revealed that Mass Effect 2 won't be an Xbox 360 exclusive right off the bat. No, that doesn't mean PS3 owners will finally be getting their share of alien lovemaking and long bouts of awkward elevator silence, just that the PC and Xbox versions will be neck and neck from day one.



GEARS 2 PATCHING ACHIEVED

Although *Gears of War 2* has been enjoying huge success, it hasn't been without its flaws. Thankfully Epic is backing their winning horse all the way to the finish line and will soon be supplying a patch that not only sorts out a number of bugs, irritations and exploits but adds in a few new achievements for players to scramble after. While none of the achievements are particularly mind-blowing, including "Skeletons in your Closet (20G) - Complete waves 1 through 10 on all Flashback Map Pack maps in Horde (any difficulty)" and "Annex: Now With Execution Rules (75G) - Win an Annex match on each Flashback and Combustible Map Pack map (public matches only)", it's always nice when developers give that little bit of extra content during a game's lifespan.





snippets

IN BITE-SIZED PORTIONS!

SONY AND VALVE **GET STEAMY**

No longer able to deny the awesome distribution power that is Steam; Sony Online Entertainment is readying to join the ranks their games available for download through the service. Kicking off the offerings will be Sony's near-immortal MMORPG Everquest and its sequel Everquest II, Vanguard: Saga of Heroes and Pirates of the Burning Sea. With Sony on board (and the distribution of other Sony titles likely in discussion), Valve has taken Steam one step closer to being the de facto standard for online game distribution services.



LEIPZIG CG GETS PWNED

If you've been tucking away pennies and working on your master plan to sneak aboard the next plane bound for the Leipzig Games Convention, now might be a good time to rethink any of the more extreme strategies. In a move that screams 'politics!', Leipziger Messe has officially dropped GC 2009 from the calendar to make way for Colognebased rival Gamescom to step in. Plenty of big names are backing the decision with Sony, Sega and Nintendo only too happy to switch loyalties to the winning side.

VEHICIII AR MAYHEM ON THE ROCKS

If you've recently come to the conclusion that the gaming industry has a serious lack of downhill vehicular mayhem, and you happen to be the proud owner of a Nintendo Wii - you're in for a pleasant surprise. The sequel to 2005's Glacier, Glacier2 gives players a choice of seven to take down 18 unique ice and snow-covered tracks - from the top of the Alps to the bottom. We're trying to ask as few questions as possible with this one, to be honest; but put it on your list of games that could be awesome' until further notice



GAMERS OUTSIDE THE XBOX 360 fold will finally be getting their fair share of *Dead* Rising, and we're not just talking about the Wii version - Chop 'Til You Drop. Capcom has been reported as stating that they've been looking at other platforms for future releases of both Dead Rising and Lost Planet (one of Direct X 10's early champions). Capcom's Keiji Inafune says "We're finally putting out new Dead Rising and Lost Planet games! As a main principle we're thinking about multi-platform, and expanding upon both slightly from the Xbox 360 version." As with EA, Capcom has been giving serious thought (and likewise, some development time) to the release of games on as many platforms as financially feasible to

if you're on the hunt for more custom toys or even

instructions on how to make your very own.

What this has resulted in is the announcement of Dead Rising 2 for the Xbox 360, PS3 and PC. While few details have been confirmed at this stage, release date included, we do know that the game will break out of the shopping mall and take place in a fictional Los Vegas-inspired city; the zombie outbreak is back after the world thought it cured. We've caught sight of zombie dancing girls, police officers and construction workers. Weapons of destruction include a dirt bike, what looks to be a giant mobile phone and a giant hamster wheel of zombie-crushing doom. Capcom has been noted as saying there will be "tens

market this last year or so.

combat the financial turbulence plaguing the of thousands of zombies" YOUR CHILDHOOD CALLED, IT WANTS ITS TOYS BACK If you were a gamer of the '80s and early '90s, no doubt you'll have fond memories of the brilliantlychallenging Contra series. John "Jin-Saotome Mallamas certainly remembers Mad Dog and Scorpion: so much so that he's taken the time to build his very own action figures! Using bits and pieces from other toys, as well as custom sculpting, painting and dangerous amounts of free time, John has put together a pair of exquisite action figures of the deadly duo. They even come with classic moments of getting your first spread shot time and time again. Sadly, John is just a humble human, and has no ties to Hasbro or any other company with the capacity to produce these fine figures on a global scale. Be sure to visit his website at www.jinsaotomesdangeroustoys.com

THEY SAID IT...

"I'd have teams work to get to far greater design clarity before they begin full-scale production. Lack of clarity up front is probably the number one reason why games are late, over budget or, in some cases, not that good."

-John Riccitiello, CEO of

"If uou don't build that into your system then you're not going to be able to compete with the gold farmers and that will ruin your ingame economy, which will in turn ruin your game. At the very least having the recognition that virtual economics is a discipline and is a very important integral part to being a virtual world."

-Kerry Fraser-Robinson, founder of RedBedlam

"The reason people pirated things in Russia is because Russians are reading magazines and watching television (and) they say, 'Man, I wa<u>nt</u> to play that game so bad,' but the publishers respond. 'You can play that game in six months... maybe."

-Jason Holtman, Valve business developer

"You will not be disappointed in the next ten years. It's a ten-year plan. *Gears* is long-term. The lancer is the new lightsaber."

-Joshua Ortega, writer on Gears of War 2



WE KNEW IT ALL ALONG

HERE ARE FEW THINGS more amusing in the gaming industry than blatant fanboys. These 'purists', as they sometimes like to be called, have had a particularly wild time having their say about just how colourful and 'undiablo-y' the screenshots for Diablo III have been since they first started pouring out of Blizzard HQ early last year. It even got to a stage where art director Brian Morrisroe, who had vehemently been defending the supposedly bright and bubbly approach, left the company. Of course this isn't the actual reason why he quit, but there's nothing like a bit of conspiracy to deepen the plot.

Now that the new art director has had a

chance to settle into the position, Blizzard has decided it's time to take the Mickey out of the whining purists with a little gesture that we can best summarise as the screenshot equivalent of flipping the bird. The first delightful mockery shows a delicate little unicorn that poos rainbows onto oncoming foes, while the second is the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man wielding a pair of flanged maces (and rather looks like he knows how to inflict some serious Blizzard has poked fun at the 58,000+ members of an online petition to change the art direction 'back to how it was before', but this most recent indecent tops all before it.



to join in the C&C fun with the release of Red Alert 3 for the console. Expected to hit the shelves this March, the PS3 version of the game is set to take advantage of Bluray's expansive real estate by packing exclusive maps and over an hour of bonus video content onto the disc. Bonus videos include behind-the-scenes interviews and documentaries, The Girls of RA3 and even a blooper real. The game will also feature PS3-exclusive BattleCast TV programming as well as a special episode of Command School with 17 tips, tricks and strategies from the development team.





I'M SORRY, BUT YOUR EXE IS

Thousands of Xbox-less PC gamers who are still playing Gears of War catch-up were recently left feeling rather short-changed. The game's executable was flagged as invalid once a certain date was reached, which completely shut down the game and forced bored gamers to try all sorts of sneaky manoeuvres to get their Lancer fix. Setting the system date back to pre-failure date proved to be a success, but that does tend to leave anti-virus, program update and system restore features a little confused. Thankfully, Epic got to work on a fix right quick, and the drama was soon solved. Many blame the Games for Windows LIVE system as a key element behind this rather embarrassing problem.

IT'S A LITTLEBIGLAND

If you're on the lookout for new content for LittleRigPlanet and don't feel like trawling through the thousands of random levels available on the PSN, you might be pleasantly surprised to discover you need not look further than our own borders. LittleBigLand is a locally developed and supported Website dedicated to all things *LBP*, and is packed to the brim with quality downloadble content from across the globe, discussion forums and tons of useful tutorials. If you fancy yourself a quality designer, the site is running their first ever level design competition with some nifty PS3 goodies up for grabs, as well as a golden crown to adorn the top of your Sackboy's precious hessian

IMMORTAL KOMBAT

While Midway games is above water, facing endless bouts of near-bankruptcy. there's little that can stop them from doing what they do best - making Mortal Kombat. While many thought their recent title, MK vs. DC, would be a gigantic flop, it turned out to be rather successful - nabbing close to 2 million sales across the oceans and granting Ed Boon another crack at the franchise. Confirmed by the man himself, Midway have announced that they're currently working on the next Mortal Kombat. They're keeping mum on any details. but given just how awesome it was to see Scorpion and Batman duke it out, we're hoping it'll be another crossover title.



ZOMBEEEEEZ!

Remember how last month we promised to stop with the whole Call of Duty zombie thing? We'd honestly love to but it seems like Treyarch is about to release a map pack for the game, including an all-new zombie map! Map Pack #1, as it's currently known, is due out on 9 March and will include three new multiplayer maps in addition to the map known as Zombie Asylum. The new maps are Nightfire, an urban map in a bombed-out Berlin; Station, an underground train station with plenty of sneaky routes and tunnels in and around the map; and Knee Deep, which takes place in an island village ravaged by the Japanese. Zombie Asylum promises players new weapons, a Perk-a-Cola machine [!] and electroshock defences. We have no idea what electroshock defences mean for us but we want them and we want them now!

WIIMOTE WAGGLING TAKES TO THE STARS

2008's space-faring scare-athon Dead Space will be making its way onto the Wii. While your first thought might involve the debilitation of the game's grimy visuals and moody lighting, we've played enough Resident Evil titles on size of the processor that counts, but how you use it. Expect plenty of desperate Wiimote waggling in the heat of battle; frankly, we can't think of a better platform for a game like this especially considering the console's serious lack of 'grownup' games. This won't be the last big-name EA title gamers will be seeing on the Wii, either; CEO John Riccitiello explains that this is just the start of a massive shift of EA's focus to the platform - to the point where they'll eventually have a 50/50 split between Nintendo's reigning champ and the remaining HD platforms in terms of title count.



XBOX ARCADE STICK

While the chances of us ever receiving this nifty little device are slim-to-none, it doesn't hurt to dream (or import, if you're that desperate). Hori, a Japanese peripherals manufacturer for a number of gaming platforms, has recently released the Real Arcade Pro EX Special Edition. What's so special about this particular edition, other than its sheer awesomeness? The fact that it's made from the guts of a real arcade machine. Hori has teamed up with Seimitsu Components, a company responsible for the building of genuine Japanese arcade cabinets. Think for a moment just how popular arcades still are in Japan, and then think on the quality of those components. If you've ever had a need for an arcade-style controller for your Xbox and worry about how



much punishment it could take from your technologically-insensitive kid brother, this is the controller for you. Well, provided the \$151 price tag isn't enough to put you off, at least. If you're crazy or happen to have about R2,000 (taking shipping into account) lying around, head over to www.hori.jp and look at their product range. The SE is currently not listed but a quick email to them should sort everything out.



THE EVOLUTION OF: Warhammer 40,000 videogames



1992; Space Crusade



1995: Space Hulk



1997: Final Liberation: Epic



1998: Chaos Gate



1999: Rites of War



2004: Dawn of War



2009: Dawn of War 2



5 ONY BOASTS A LIST of 24 publishers that have been given licences to create content for PlayStation Home, which includes Activision, Disney, Konami and Namco Bandai. • Wii Fit has claimed the top spot in the UK software sales chart for the fourth consecutive week, not yet beating the previous record holder: Pokémon Gold, which held the chart for seven weeks. • Nintendo's DSi kept the top of the Japanese sales charts ending, 1 February, shifting over 55 thousand units that week. • Sony Computer Entertainment Europe has unveiled three new colours for the PSP-3000: Mystic Silver, Pearl White and Radiant Red. • Sony has revealed that preorders for **Killzone 2** have reached over 1.1 million units in Europe alone. • According to Sony Computer Entertainment Australia, the install base for the PlayStation 3 down under sits at over 460,000 units, with 213,000 of those units having been sold this past year. • PSP games led the Japanese software sales charts ending 1 February, with Tales of the World: Radiant Mythology claiming the number 1 spot, shifting 213,000 units in its first week. • Microsoft has announced that over 1 million Xbox LIVE users have downloaded and activated the digital movie renting service **Netflix** on their Xbox 360s since its launch three months ago, • Light, colour, rumble and airflow controlling technology producer amBX has bought a middleware licence for the PlayStation 3. • Confident as ever, CEO of EA John Riccitiello claims that Electronic Arts can rival Nintendo's success on the Wii. "The Nintendo Wii is even more important than one year ago. It is a clear leader in this cycle," said Riccitiello. "They are getting half our emphasis in terms of title count." • Even though the UK and US have both seen strong growth in the videogame market, **Japan** is suffering from a 13% decline in 2008 due to less PlayStation 2 software being available. • At the top of the 2008 software chart in terms of sales for all three regions: Mario Kart Wii, selling 8.94 million units for the year. Wii Fit sits at second, with 8.31 million units. • Nintendo president and CEO, Satoru Iwata, told investors that he believes there is even more room for the **DS and Wii** to grow. "Especially in the case of DS, when you apply this five-year cycle theory to a platform that has been through its fifth holiday season since its 2004 launch, a concern that DS business may slow down in the next fiscal year may appear to be logical at first glance," he admitted. • Sony Computer Entertainment Europe's David Reeves has said that he believes the **PlayStation 3** will always demand the highest price in the home console market. • Sony has blamed the appreciation of the yen, price competition and the global economic slowdown for a 18 billion yen loss (\$197 million) for the third quarter ending 31 December, 2008. For the same period in 2007, the company recorded a profit 236.2 billion yen.





Multi Bay HDD Module ScrewLess & TrayLess



Product Features

- * User friendly Screw-less design just plug in the hard drive and play.
- * Full aluminum built cooling body constructed.
- * Fully supports Hot-Swap function.
- * Compact and space saving for multiple drive fit
- * Huge warm air detachable outtake fan cooling.
- * Multi-drive exchangeability & maintenance capabilities.
- * Easy installation & No driver needed.
- * Advanced drive monitoring system built internally with visual & audio indicators.

Suggested Applications

Storage drives expansion and enabling drive maintenance to industrial PC, server, and various storage system applications.



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ENSEMBLE IS DOWN

Even though Microsoft's Ensemble Studios, the company behind the Age of Empires series as well as the upcoming Xbox-exclusive Halo Wars, are going to be officially closed once Halo Wars hits the shelves, there might still be a glimmer of hope for the talented developers who haven't found a new job yet. One chunk of those who remain will form a new studio that will initially handle all Ensemble Online support, including that for Halo Wars. Many of the remaining crew have also confirmed that they'll be forming another development studio, although it currently remains nameless and without any projects to work on. Expect details as they emerge; this is one group of developers who we won't be taking our eyes off any



UCLICK, UREAD, UENJOY

The idea of digitised comicson-the-go is nothing new. For ages, homebrew developers have been ensuring that almost any portable device with a colour screen and reasonable resolution has support for PDF reading. While a PDF reader is fine and dandy, and plenty of comic books are available in the popular format (one way or another), comics are notoriously different from regular documents in the way they're read - making traditional solutions to this conundrum fail time and time again. iPhone AppStore developer UClick is here with a real solution to this problem, by offering a reading mechanism and downloadable comic books (currently priced at \$0.99 each) that allow the user to read their favourite comics panel-bypanel on their iPhone, with no annoying transitions or audio to interfere with your reading. The advantages to this system are obvious, panel-by-panel reading means no more ruined surprises by accidentally reading ahead, distribution is quick and easy, and the iPhone's powerful backlight enhances colours and improves readability in low-light situations.



MORE DOOM AND GLOOM

SEGA TO AXE 560 JOBS

SEGA Sammy Holdings (since, as you know, SEGA was bought by Sammy like, ages ago) has announced dramatic measures to alleviate losses, starting with the closer of 110 amusement facilities (mostly pachinko parlours, probably) as well as "voluntary" redundancies of some 560 staff.

"SEGA has failed to swiftly respond to sharp changes in the business conditions," read the company's investor report. "[SEGA] is expected to record substantial operating losses in its amusement facilities business and consumer business in two consecutive years."

The staff cuts will account for some 18 percent of the company's workforce. If all 560 redundancies are met voluntarily, the firm will save itself an annual labour cost of some 5 billion yen.

"Furthermore, in the amusement machine business and consumer business, SEGA will reduce research and development cost by approximately 20 percent [compared with fiscal year 2008] for the next fiscal year by consolidating titles to be developed and otherwise."

It's unclear exactly what "voluntary" means with regards to the redundancies. Perhaps they ask really nicely, and offer a cookie?

"In the amusement facilities business due to slumping personal consumption affected by unforeseeable economic prospects, revenues of its existing amusement facilities have continued to remain at a level lower than the actual results for the previous fiscal year," the company said.

SEGA added that sales for Sonic Unleashed and Football Manager 2009 were particularly strong. "However, in Japan, sales of titles for the year-end shopping season were weak, and whole-year numbers of sales are expected to fall below the initial plan."



EIDOS CLOSES STUDIO

2007 as part of the publisher's efforts to gain market share in the browers and mobile games sector, Rockpool Games in Manchester is now being shut down. Fourteen staff will be laid off as a result, though it is unclear where the remaining 22 staff members will be going as the studio was purchased with 36 staff.

Eidos stated that it had purchased the studio due to the projected growth of the mobile games sector. However, recently an Eidos spokesperson mentioned that, "as a company we need to focus our efforts on high-quality titles that will deliver long-term franchise value, and in these incredibly challenging and competitive times we need to proactivly manage our cost base".

activly manage our cost base". In the face of the poor commercial response to Eidos and its core IP, *Tomb Raider*, such custcutting is not unexpected. Rumour has it that Eidos is in ongoing talks with an unnamed suitor interested in purchasing the publisher.

MICROSOFT CLOSES FLIGHT SIMULATOR DEVELOPER

As part of the significant changes being made to Microsoft's Entertainment and Devices division (Microsoft had previously announced plans to axe 5,000 jobs), one internal studio has already met with the chopping block.

ACES, the studio responsible for 25 years of the Flight Simulator series, has been shut down. In the same cut, over 30% of the company's videogame testers have been laid off. According to Dean Takahashi from Venture Beat, "the game group is expected to undergo a management restructuring".

Flight Simulator is considered Microsoft's oldest product, the original version released in 1982. However, a Microsoft spokeswoman has said that while the studio has been closed, Microsoft remains committed to the Flight Simulator franchise.

"We can confirm the closing of ACES Studios, which was responsible for the Flight Simulator franchise," Microsoft spokeswoman Kelda Rericha told Appscout. "We are committed to the Flight Simulator franchise, which has proven to be a successful PC-based game for the last 27 years," Rericha added. "You should expect us to continue to invest in enabling great Live experiences on Windows, including flying games, but we have nothing specific to announce at this time."





LOOK & LISTEN RECOMMENDS..

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 Silent Hill: Homecoming
- 2 The Godfather 2
- 3 The Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena
- 4 Far Crv 2
- 5 FIFA (

XBUX 3EU

- 1 Halo Wars
- 2 Gears of War 2
- **3** Fable
- 4 50 Cent: Bulletproof
- 5 Far Cry 2

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 2 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 3 WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009
- 4 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Platinum
- 5 Call of Duty: World at War

PC

- 1 World of Warcraft: Wrath of the Lich King
- 2 Dawn of War II
- 3 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 4 Call of Duty: World at War
- 5 Far Crv 2

PSP

- 1 Ben 10: Alien Force
- 2 Resistance: Retribution
- 3 Ben 10
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 God of War: Chains of Olympus

WII

- 1 Mario Kart + Wheel
- 2 My Fitness Coach
- 3 Family Ski & Snowboard
- 4 Disney Sing It: Camp Rock + Microphone
- 5 Wii Fit

DS

- 1 Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training: How Old Is Your Brain?
- 2 Super Mario Bros.
- 3 Pokémon Diamond
- 4 Mario Kart
- 5 High School Musical 3: Senior Year

GfK

November figures provided by GfK www.gfksa.co.za

PLAYSTATION 3

- 1 MotorStorm
- 2 FIFA 09
- 3 Call of Duty: World at War
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 Grand Theft Auto IV

XROX 360

- 1 FIFA 09
- 2 Gears of War 2
- 3 LEGO Indiana Jones: The Original Adventure:
- 4 Kung Fu Panda
- 5 Call of Duty: World at War

PLAYSTATION 2

- 1 Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas Platinum
- 2 Need for Speed: ProStreet
- 3 Ben 10: Protector of the Earth
- 4 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 5 WWE SmackDown vs. RAW 2009

PC

- 1 Timeshift
- 2 Grand Theft Auto IV
- 3 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 4 Rainbow Six: Vegas
- 5 Command & Conquer: Red Alert 3

PSF

- 1 FIFA 07
- 2 Need for Speed: Undercover
- 3 Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire
- 4 FIFA Street 2
- 5 SSX On Tour 4

WII

- 1 Wii Sports
- 2 Wii Fit with board
- 3 Wii Play
- 4 Disney Sing It: Camp Rock + Microphone
- Need for Speed: Undercover

пѕ

- 1 Dr. Kawashima's Brain Training: How Old Is Your Brain?
- 2 Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games
- 3 Mario Kart
- 4 Nintendogs: Dalmations and Friends
- 5 Pokémon Pear





EA FORGETS HOW CALENDARS WORK

WHILE EA HAS BEEN bringing joy to the faces of millions of gamers worldwide with their upcoming release lists, they've managed to reverse much of the joy by postponing three of their biggest releases for this year. Despite the publisher's habit of churning out Sims games and expansions in perfect succession, they've decided to cool their heels a bit and extend the Q1 release of The Sims 3 to the second of June this year. EA's VP of Marketing says, "The June launched combined with the break-through game the team is building gives us the perfect runway to create awareness for The Sims 3." Translation: "It's not ready yet; give us a couple of months to iron out the kinks"

Continuing the dismay is *Dragon Age: Origins* - the highly-anticipated RPG from Bioware to be published by EA. Despite talks of an early 2009 release, the game has now been pushed back to the second half of this year to coincide with the console version's release date. The *Godfather 2* has also been pushed back a few months. Although the public was meant to have this game in their hands at this very moment, the release has been extended to sometime between April and June. The reason? EA is hoping that an extended marketing lead will increase hype and improve day one sales – but we suspect there's actually a fair bit of polish to do before this title is ready for shipping.

Games of the universe are all coming to one location...



VIOLENCE AND GORE NOT NEEDED FOR FUN

After going around and surveying 2,670 "frequent" gamers (or "gamers") twice and conducting four different "experiments" with over 300 university undergraduates, researchers at the University of Rochester discovered that violence does not make games more fun.

Except if you're the type who abhors all things cute and non-violent, obviously.

Lead author Andrew Przybylski, a graduate student in social psychology, said they "wanted to know if the violent content by itself was motivating because these games also do offer compelling challenges and stories".

These findings were gleamed from what researchers described as a "good deal of violent content" in games such as Team Fortress 2, Halo 3 and World of Warcraft (what?). Not content with only such incidental findings, they also modified Half-I ife 2 - one version with totally ramped up blood, guts and gore and another with no violence what so ever. Scholars found that "on average, violent content didn't add to motivation for play.

It seems only about five percent of respondents had a preference for violent games.

In fact, Pryzbylski said the games are popular because they offer players meaningful opportunities to interact and work together, or to feel effective and exercise choice.

"The reason why children gravitate to something like Halo, Halo 3 or World of Warcraft or Team Fortress isn't necessarily because they want to get at the blood or the acts of violence," said Przybylski.

"What they're really chasing is having their psychological needs met. Cranking up the violence knob doesn't automatically make a game automatically more fun."

MARCH RELEASES

Subject to change Release list and special offers provided by **BT Games**

| Date | Game | Platforms | Date | Game | Platforms |
|------|---|-----------------------|---|--|-----------------------|
| 6 | 50 Cent: Blood on the Sand | PS3, 360 | 20 | Dawn of War 2 | PC |
| 6 | Age of Empire | DS | 20 | GTA Chinatown Wars | DS |
| 6 | Battalion Wars 2 | Wii | 20 | Halo 3 Classics | 360 |
| 6 | Blast Works | WII | 20 | Mass Effect Classics | 360 |
| 6 | Castlevania Judgement | WII | 20 | Ninja Blade | 360 |
| 6 | Codename Panzers : Cold War | PC | 20 | Persona 4 | PS2 |
| 6 | Company of Heroes : Tales of Valor | PC | | PGR 4 Classics | |
| 6 | Damnation | PC, PS3, 360 | 20 | | 360 |
| 6 | Donkey Kong: Jungle Climber | DS | 20 | The Chronicles of Riddick : Assault on Dark Athena | PC, PS3, 360 |
| 6 | Killzone 2 | PS3 | 20 | The Last Remnant | PC |
| 6 | Pro Evo Soccer 09 | WII | WII 20 | Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X | PC, PS3, 360 |
| 6 | Resistance Retribution | PSP | Pre-Order to receive an exclusive F-22 Fighter Plane Unlock Code | | |
| 6 | Silent Hill Homecoming | PC, PS3 | 20 | Wario Land: The Shake Dimension | Wii |
| 6 | Singstar Queen plus microphone | PS2, PS3 | 20 | Wheelman | PC, PS3, 360 |
| 6 | SOCOM Confrontation | PS3 | 20 | WWE Legends of Wrestlemania | PS3, X360 |
| 13 | Cabela's Dangerous Hunts 3 | WII, PS2, PS3, 360 | 27 | Afro Samuari | PS3, 360 |
| 13 | Championship Paintball | · | 27 | Animal Crossing: Lets Go to the City | Wii |
| 13 | Championship Faintbatt | WII, PS2, PS3, 360 | 27 | Disgaea | DS |
| 13 | Empire Total War Pre-Order and get access to a powerful elite unit for use in game. Available Units are Hussars Unit, | PC | 27 | Don King Boxing | Wii, DS |
| | | | 27 | DS Lite Colours | DS |
| 13 | Amazon Unit or USS Constitution. Eve Online | PC | 27 | Guitar Hero World Tour plus Guitar | WII, PS2, PS3, 360 |
| 13 | Monster Jam Urban Assault | PS2, PSP, Wii, DS | 27 | Guitar Hero World Tour standalone Guitar | WII, PS2, PS3, 360 |
| 13 | Secret Service | PS2, 360 | 27 | Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass | DS |
| 13 | Spore Galactic Adventures | PC | 27 | Tenchu 4 | WII |
| 20 | Battleforge | PC | 27 | Tom Clancy's Endwar | PC |
| | | | | | |

FREE RADICAL SAVED BY CRYTEK

AXIMUM BUYOUT! LAST MONTH we reported that Haze, Time Splitters and upcoming Star Wars Battleground developer Free Radical had closed up shop. However, in a last-minute bid, Crysis developer Crytek saved the company by purchasing the whole thing. Over 40 staff were hired along with the purchase of the company and its intellectual properties.

"After seven long weeks of uncertainty, I can confirm that Free Radical is now out of the woods. We've been bought by a really, really good company," said Yescombe.

Crytek has officially renamed Free Radical Design to Crytek UK, and said that the company would now be "integrated into Crytek's network".

"We're very excited about this step to expand

Crytek into the UK with such an experienced and highly talented team," says Crytek boss Avni Yerli.

"Free Radical Design is a great fit to Crytek and its culture, given that Free Radical has a proven track record on delivering high quality games. The combination of this team, the Crytek network and our CryEngine technology will be a foundation for outstanding gaming experiences and a magnet for the best talent in the UK."

Sadly, Battlefront 3 has already been passed over to a new developer, and the technology that allowed you to fly from the ground to air and then into orbit stayed with Free Radical. The new developer, sources say, will be using cutscenes for the transitions.



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THIS DAY IN GAMING: MARCH



n

(2000) Microsoft announces the first Xbox. We doubt even they imagined where it'd be today.



26

(1999) Everquest is

released. Soon after, the term "MMORPG

addict" is coined.

(EVENT) SciFest Africa - Grahamstown. Until 31 March. www.scifest.org.za





CAPTION OF THE MONTH

Every month we'll choose a screenshot from any random game and write

a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better caption. The winner

MARCH CONTEST

NAG'S LAME ATTEMPT: "Patty-cake, patty-cake.

baker's man.



3

2

(2006) The DS Lite

is unstoppable.

is released in Japan. Nintendo's steamroller



19

(1994) Super Metroid lands on the SNES in Japan. Millions identity.





BADGER, BADGER, BADGER

Find the Badger! He could be in a

or anywhere, really. Find him and send an e-mail to ed@nag. co.za with the subject line [March Badger]. We'll announce a random

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www.rudra.co.za

screenshot, on a piece of hardware

winner next month and that person will win a limited-edition Badger

by our spam software and deleted. [2] If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve

to win things [3] Obey all posted speed limits [4] Never run with scissors [5] There is no

FEBRUARY WINNER

"And here is the main reason South African Water is not

Tonie Grobbelaar

(2000) The PS2 is released in Japan. It goes on to become the most successful console of all time



(1998) NES Hot Pursuit is released. The serie takes a massive leap

20

(LAN) Evolution LAN (Kempton Park) www.langames.co.za 28

(LAN) Mavhem (Boksburg) www.langames.co.za

5



(2003) Final Fantasy the mark by about a thousand battle



29

6



14

15

22

(1996) The first Resident Evil hits the PlayStation Anewera 30

7



(2002) The Resident Evil movieis released in the US. Milla Jovovich is about the best part of it





LAST MONTH'S WINNER

Gordon, p69







(2001) A Pokémon Edition of the Gameboy Color is announced; we can still hear the shrieks of joy coming from Japan

(2004) UT 2004 hits US shelves. Many believe it marks the end of the



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Miktar's Meanderings



by Miktar Dracon

Parable: The Milkshake Tail Wags the Marketer Dog

THERE ARE POWERFUL PEOPLE in the videogame industry who make pertinent billion-dollar decisions each day. Their signature can birth a newly funded game development studio, shift millions in research and development money from one console to another, or single-handedly doom an entire publisher down a mismanaged path of self-destruction.

Such people are just too busy to know everything, so they rely on well-funded groups to provide them with the information they need to make informed decisions. These well-funded groups are called "marketers."

The marketers study consumers and focus groups, collect information and collate and present it all to the powers that be as the definitive informative view on the industry. Often, marketers are in cahoots with analysts - a dangerous mix.

When looked at critically, many a marketer make the mistake of coming to the conclusion that the customer creates the market. They ignore the fundamental unit of analysis needed to develop products customers will buy. The job a product performs is this fundamental unit, not the customer. People don't buy products - they hire products to perform jobs in a functional, social or emotional dimension.

Currently in the videogame industry, marketers literally see the literal. They see grandmas, housewives and busy people, who they call "casual gamers." The horror of the malformed "casual games" comes from marketers studying consumers and concluding that they are "casual"; the tail is wagging the dog.

To illustrate this idea better, the "Parable of the Milkshakes" (Clayton Christensen - What Customers Want From Your Products) is the best example of the difference between studying customers versus studying what jobs a customer wants performed.

A fast-food restaurant wanted to improve milkshake sales. The marketers profiled the demographics and personalities of customers who bought milkshakes, inviting people who fit those profiles to suggest improvements. Thicker or cheaper, chunkier or more chocolate - "What would satisfy you better?" was asked. The focus group gave clear feedback and the improvements were implemented.

There was no impact on sales.

So, a new researcher was brought in. This one spent the entire day at the restaurant, trying to understand the jobs that customers were trying to be done when they hired a milkshake. He found that 40% of the milkshakes were bought in the mornings by customers who were alone, didn't buy anything else, and who drank their milkshakes in the car. This

analyst interviewed the morning customers, and found that most bought the milkshake to perform a similar job: they had a long, boring commute, weren't yet hungry, but knew they would be by 10am. They wanted to have something now that would stave off hunger, they were in a hurry, they were wearing work clothes, and they had at most one free hand.

Other choices were available, but milkshakes did the job better. It took people 20 minutes to suck the thick shake through the thin straw, which made the commute less boring. They could drink it with one hand; stayed clean, and felt less hungry than when they tried the alternatives. As important as what they cared about was what they didn't: they didn't care that it wasn't healthy - becoming healthy wasn't important to the job they were hirring the milkshake to do. One thing they did care about: the milkshakes were convenient, but they were bland in texture.

And it was found that at other times of the day, parents bought milkshakes along with meals for their kids to placate the children and avoid saying no to treats. Here the milkshake wasn't perfect either. Parents had to wait impatiently after they had finished their own food, while the kids struggled to suck the thick shakes up through the thin straws. Different customers hired milkshakes for different jobs. By trying to average a generic bullet-point list of improvements together, the original researchers created a one-size-fits-none product.

Once the jobs required of the product had been determined, it was clear why the old strategy didn't work. Armed with this, the winning strategy emerged: fruit mixed into the shakes to delight and surprise commuters, and pre-paid swipe cards for them to quickly get in and out on the way to work. For the parents, wider straws to let the kids finish by the time mom and dad were done eating. Identifying and improving the product's functional and social aspects did the job better, allowing the company's milkshakes to gain market share against the real competition – not competitor's milkshakes but things such as bagels and bananas; candy and boredom. The new milkshakes would grow the market.

The moral: job-defined markets are generally much larger than product category-defined markets. That's why "casual gamers" doesn't work. The customer's point of view is not a product category. This is why marketing men and publishing executives are baffled by the new emphasis on so-called casual games: they don't understand why people play these new games. They clumsily create games that fill a bullet-point list – "50 mini-games, low difficulty" - but fail to understand why those games aren't received well.

People don't want to buy a quarter-inch drill. They want a quarter-inch hole!

Theodore Levitt, American economist and professor at Harvard Business School, who coined the term "qlobalization"







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Dammit



by Megan Hughes

For The Last Time...

■ **OW IS IT POSSIBLE** for a person to use their computer in such a way as to have directed themselves to a particular Website, and subsequently signed up to the forum located therein (which involves the highly annoying and apparently complex task of verifying one's e-mail address), only to create a post declaring his or her inability to use the keyboard in such a way as to create the ever elusive question mark? And how does it happen that a person, with an IQ clearly somewhere near that of your average potted plant, manages to find him or herself in your online game, sharing your server, assaulting your brain cells?

Naturally, the answer is frighteningly simple: technology, in its current form, is no longer the domain of the geek, nerd, or otherwise more than just computerliterate individual. Although this has allowed for the influx of 'stupid' on the Internet, this lack of discrimination has many upsides to it too. If technology provides the land of the equal, with none being more equal than others, then what better place is there for those who are often grouped together as secondary citizens? To the computer or the console, it doesn't matter whether your legs, ears or lungs function or what your day job, your race, your creed or culture is. Every person is given the opportunity to enjoy themselves with the games available.

Yet, in this land of non-discrimination, there seems to be but a single hurdle left to overcome. At this point, let me note for the record the exact definition of the word "gamer" (thanks to my old friend, the Illustrated Oxford English Dictionary): "noun, a person who plays a game or games." Please note the use of the word "person." For those still confused, the word "person" is defined as "an individual human being" without reference to stature, income, race or gender. Why then is it still popular to lob the word "girl" in front of the word "gamer," as if the term "gamer" were not sufficiently defined to cover the fact that some gamers may in fact be female?

And if technology doesn't discriminate, allowing every gamer (be they male or female) equal opportunity to kill your dudes, capture your points, and generally hand your beaten-up and broken digital avatar back to you on a plate, then why do some people insist on

treating gamers differently depending on their gender? You see, it is not simply a matter of arguing semantics here, but rather noting the effects that labels

Labels suggest a differentiation, declaring not only what a thing is, but what it is not as well as implying how one should act towards that thing (especially when that label is concerned with people). For instance, the label of "professor" implies authority and superior intelligence, and that formal language would be the most acceptable when addressing this person, whereas the label "mother" has other connotations entirely. Ironically, one person could have both those labels and more.

The label "girl gamer" suggests that a female who plays games is a phenomenon so rare it requires its own prefix. Naturally, not all gamers commit this cardinal sin. However, many seem to think that when they come across someone they call a "girl gamer," it gives them permission to either inundate her with vulgar and abrasive messages and target her avatar specifically, or act on their 'stalker impulses' by harassing her with totally inappropriate messages while being careful to let them win at whatever game they might be playing.

Boys, I know that some of you have very little experience in this department, but the plain and honest truth is that girls are just like you. We just want to play our favourite games, whatever they might be, and enjoy ourselves. No, we aren't using our online personas to pick up dates, nor do we want any special treatment. Treat every gamer as equal, some just more annoying than others, and you'll probably find yourself enjoying gaming and your fellow gamers' company all the more. And please stop using the tautological term "girl gamers" - you're just making yourself look silly.

SOMEWHERE RIGHT NOW A FAT LADY IS SINGING

A few readers already know that this is my last column, but I want to thank all those who stopped by this page every month. It has been an amazing experience being part of the *NAG* team, and I hope you got as much joy out of this column as I did. **NAG**

And if technology doesn't discriminate, allowing every gamer (be they male or female) equal opportunity to kill your dudes, capture your points, and generally hand your beaten-up and broken digital avatar back to you on a plate, then why do some people insist on treating gamers differently depending on their gender?



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Ramjet



by Walt Pretorius

Leaner and meaner

THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY HAS long been believed to be recession proof, but recent events indicate that is isn't. Not really. See, while people smilingly tell us – these would be industry analysts such as Michael Pachter and Billy Pidgeon – that the industry would never suffer because core gamers basically have a screwed-up set of priorities that mean they will rather buy games than food, the actions of some very big names in the industry would imply otherwise.

Take Electronic Arts, for example. This massive publisher should be more or less unassailable (in the over-simplified school of economics I ascribe to, that is), but they have been shedding employees and studios like unwanted puppies for a while now... in a sack, with a brick, into the river. That's been the case with Pandemic's Australian outfit, at least, while Black Box (the guys who did Need for Speed and skate) has been consolidated into another studio. Mythic got the chop, in terms of staff. So did Tiburon, who do a lot of the American sports titles. They've even sliced away at marketing and PR staff.

And EA isn't the only giant who is feeling the pinch. Microsoft is letting staff go, although it seems that the entertainment division will be largely unaffected. Sony is eyeing the chopping block meaningfully, and while it appeared that the PlayStation division would be okay, recent figures show big declines in sales.

Smaller studios and publishers have also given staff members the boot – some

have even closed down.

Industry pundits say that we'll also see less big-name titles released this year, after the massive catalogue of 2008.

What is really an interesting thought is this: what happens when things turn around? Inevitably, the economic chaos sweeping the globe must end, whether by hook or by crook. Will all these suddenly unemployed videogame industry people be rehired by the companies that axed them (have they no pride)? Or will they band together and form their own operations? The latter seems quite likely, actually, and chances are that we shall see a massive number of start-up companies flinging potentially good games onto the market... before the big boys come along and buy them all out, meaning that the hapless fools might as well have gone for option one in the first place.

So no, the industry is not recession proof. It just reacts to the recession differently. It's less like a pack of lemmings going over a cliff, and more like a dog that's been stung on the nuts by a wasp - it will whimper for a while, but when it recovers, it will probably be meaner for the experience.

We as gamers shouldn't worry too much about these events. Sure, there may be less games, and a rotten exchange rate may chase prices up, but we shall still be getting quality products. And, in the end, I personally believe that the leaner, meaner videogame industry resulting from this economic weight-loss programme will be to our benefit. NAG

In the end, I personally believe that the leaner, meaner videogame industry resulting from this economic weightloss programme will be to our benefit.



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Q&A: INTROVERSION

The "last of the bedroom programmers", known for their cult-classic games and sleek retro-minimalist style, recently upgraded their workspace to a living-room. We caught up with Mark Morris (Managing Director), Chris Delay (Creative Director) and Vicky Arundel (Head of Marketing) from Introversion and asked a few questions regarding their more recent and upcoming titles.





Q: For all those who've yet to be exposed to Multiwinia, what would you like to say to gamers to convince them to try it?

Vicky: "It may not make for the most sophisticated response, but I really think that Multiwinia's main strength is how much fun it is to play! Inspired originally by the IndieGameJam, our idea was to pitch huge armies of sprites against each other in massive chaotic wars. We gradually developed this further over two years to create a set of six action-packed multiplayer mini-game modes, set in one of the most stunningly unique in-game environments we guarantee you'll have ever seen. Although based on our award-winning single player title Darwinia, Multiwinia is a much fasterpaced affair and without a doubt the most accessible and instantaneously fun of all Introversion's releases so far.'

Q: It's been a long road for Introversion so far, with four games released, two new titles in the works and your recent game, Multiwinia, heading to Xbox Live Arcade in the form of the Darwinia+ package. Aside from the perils of content creation, what do you consider is the most important lesson learned thus far?

Mark: "You're not going to like this answer, but there generally isn't one area of the business that I can point to and say we got that wrong. This is a very fickle industry and you can work two years on a labour of love and release it with as much noise as you can possibly make and you create about as much impact as a punch from Stephen Hawking. When these things happen you need to quickly move on, try to evaluate what mistakes you made, learn from them and get on with it. Admitting your failures and not getting upset when things go wrong is crucial when running a business, you need to keep focused on the future and stay positive. Biggest lesson learnt: Don't dwell on your mistakes, move on."

Q: On the Introversion blog, you made a call out to fans and publishers alike to help spread the word about Multiwinia, saying that the demo hasn't had quite the uptake expected even though the conversion rate from demo to full has been high. Do you feel there really is a problem getting mainstream exposure if you're an indie outfit?

Vicky: "This is a tough one as there are. I

think, a number of reasons why we have had problems getting the word out about Multiwinia. In fact, in the past Introversion has always been pretty successful at spreading the word via the games press, so we wonder whether the perception (wrongly held) is that Multiwinia is an add-on pack to Darwinia rather than Introversion's fourth stand-alone title, and because of this, therefore, somehow less worthy of full coverage.

Perhaps more worrying, though, is the trend within the gaming press to only cover triple A titles, at the expense of smaller-budget games. This is concerning, because indie developments rely massively on free coverage of their titles to make it through as they simply don't have the marketing budgets of larger publishers. Multiwinia was unfortunately released during a glut of massive new releases, which I think definitely made it a lot harder to be heard above all the noise and hype. The trouble is that indie development will die if we don't have full support of the people who make a living from writing and talking about the games industry."

Q: Considering the success you've managed with Valve's Steam digital distribution service and the recent release of additional online retailers such as Stardock's Impulse and Penny-Arcade's Greenhouse, what role do you see such services playing in the future of the gaming industry?

Mark: "Every developer needs a channel to reach the customers. In the past we have been very successful selling through our store, Steam and retail. As time has moved forward, we are thinking about using some of the other content delivery networks that are out there. Fundamentally it doesn't make a lot of sense to limit the availability of your game, so the wider you can distribute your games, the more likely you are of finding a market and being successful. The "Greenhouses" of the world may not be as big as Steam, but I think they are going to become increasingly important in helping indie developers reach their customer base."

Q: There is such scant information about your upcoming title, Subversion, aside from some stunning images and videos released showing off the procedural city generation. The world at large has absolutely no clue as to what genre of game it will be, leaving people free to rampantly speculate. Would you care to comment on the speculation, if only to make it clear what Subversion will not be?

Chris: "The thing to realise is that we don't have a clear idea of what Subversion will be either. We are experimenting, mixing technology prototypes with artistry and seeing what emerges at the end. That said, I do now have quite a clear idea of what sort of game I want to make with Subversion, but I think it's much too early to talk openly about it. I know from past history that the final game can end up being very different to the original intention - and that's not a bad thing - but if you "promise" certain features and don't deliver them then gamers can get a little unset

We don't usually talk about our games in advance, so Subversion is an odd experiment for us in this regard - I've been blogging about it since day one basically. And I think the







journey of starting from nothing and building a complete game is fascinating, and I'd love to read similar blogs on other developer's games. Our intention is really to reveal the "process" by which Introversion designs and builds a game - rather than focusing on the game itself."

Q: What are your thoughts on how to turn an editor into a game, with regards to how they did that for World of Goo, going from experimental plaything to fullfeatured retail title?

Chris: "Editors as games does seem to be in fashion at the moment - Spore and LittleBigPlanet are both big games that utilise their content editors as a major component of the game. I think a lot of people love to create things and those games capitalise on that very well.

Regarding World of Goo, I'm a big fan of the prototype development method and I think it works very well for games in general. At the very start of a game project you have no idea what game you are making, and if you do then it basically means you're copying something that already exists "with a twist". If you are genuinely making something original then quick and dirty prototypes are a great way to explore ideas. The fact that the 2D Boy guys managed to turn their prototype into a fully fledged game is testament to their talent – making a finished and polished game is also a major achievement."

Q: Since you're building towards an idea with Subversion, what types of fun have you discovered in a randomly generated system like what you've built thus far, given

Spore's lack of a "game" feeling?

Chris: "We're not quite at that stage yet - Subversion is still a slightly dissonant collection of technology demos and ideas, so it doesn't fit together as a game yet. But the wonderful thing about procedurally generated worlds is that you can make relatively small improvements to a particular generation algorithm - say the algorithm that puts windows onto the surfaces of buildings - and let the generator run again, and you suddenly have masses of extra detail all over your city that just looks incredible."

Q: How far down the "procedural generation" rabbit-hole do you think you're going to go, considering you've already got cities being generated, complete with streets, buildings and internal areas to the buildings?

Chris: "The intention behind Subversion has been to use procedural generation for absolutely everything, and I still think that can be achieved. But you really can't beat hand-made content - no procedural system can rival the creativity of a real person, and it shouldn't be thought of in that way. The central core of Subversion will be carefully and deliberately crafted - but the entire world in which the game is set (which could account for as much as 80% of the game content) can be filled in with procedural generation. The more important the item being generated, the more human involvement should go into it. Hand-made content gives you the richness and depth that only humans can come up with - procedural content gives you the breadth the massive scale of your game world." NAG

Miktar Dracon

previews

WHAT WE WANT



You scream, I scream, we all scream for... yeah, whatever. We'd actually give up all the ice cream in the world for the next Call of Duty. Hopefully the masterminds at Infinity Ward will come up with a topper for CoD5's Nazi zombie level. May we suggest Nazi jihadist zombie strippers? Riding pshyic dolphins! With bears! And lasers! Okay, forget it... just give us our ice cream.



| Rank | Game |
|------|--|
| 1 | Ice cream!!!! |
| 2 | Call of Duty Modern Warfare 2 |
| 3 | Quake Live |
| 4 | The Godfather 2 |
| 5 | PROTOTYPE |
| 6 | Guitar Hero Metallica |
| 7 | Mass Effect 2 |
| 8 | The Sims 3 |
| 9 | Dead Rising 2 |
| 10 | Dead Space 2 |
| 11 | Dawn of War II |
| 12 | X-Men Origins: Wolverine |
| 13 | Battlefield 1943 |
| 14 | Doom IV |
| 15 | Street Fighter IV |
| 16 | Dragon Age: Origins |
| 17 | Halo Wars |
| 18 | Tom Clancy's H.A.W.X. |
| 19 | Ghost Busters |
| 20 | Call of Duty Map Pack |
| 21 | Battlefield Bad Company 2 |
| 22 | Singularity |
| 23 | Afro Samurai |
| 24 | Prey 2 |
| 25 | Chronicles of Riddick: Assualt on Dark Athena |
| 26 | Marvel Ultimate Alliance 2 |
| 27 | Death Tank |
| 28 | Mafia 2 |
| 29 | Red Dead Redemption |



JUMPGATE EVOLUTION

Developer→ NetDevil | Publisher→ Codemasters | Genre→ MMO | Release Date→ March 2009

THE SPACE COMBAT GENRE hasn't been getting a lot of love in recent years. Sure, the odd title pops up every once in a while, but gamers wanting to experience the vastness of space from the comfort of their homes aren't exactly spoiled for choice. Sure, there's EVE Online, but some gamers don't like hundreds of nested menu tabs and insanity-inducing complexity in their space simulators. Jumpgate Evolution focuses heavily on accessibility, so if the former statement applies to you, then read on. Jumpgate has been around since 2001, so you may be wondering why we're chatting to you about it here. Well, Jumpgate Evolution is, as the title suggests, an evolution of the game, which makes use of pretty lights (read: updated graphics) and a streamlined experience to appeal to possible newcomers. Combat is all about twitch gameplay and the mouse is used to aim at enemies and to steer your ship (much like the control system that was employed in Freelancer and certain other games). The arcade

feel of the combat extends further than just the controls – there aren't any complexities like diverting power to specific ship components (such as diverting power to your rear shields to increase the chances of escaping from an enemy). The staple MMO elements are there, such as gaining experience (and subsequently levelling up, which simply unlocks new abilities - no stats to be tweaked here), loot drops and boss enemies that require groups of players in order to take down. One MMO mainstay that will be non-existent is the random element, since the outcome of a battle will not be based on dice rolls, but on player skill and equipment load-out. Players will be able to buy new ships and weapons, craft items and battle against other players in PvP instances. If you're looking for an arcade-type space simulator and don't mind having to pay a monthly subscription fee, then you might want to keep an eye on Jumpgate Evolution. NAG

Dane Remendes

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034

Developer→ BioWare | Publisher→ LucasArts | Genre→ MMORPG | Release Date→ TBA

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DS

NAG



desire for an online Star Wars game was surely satiated. Apparently not. "There were rumours of this game before it was even thought up by us," laughs James Ohlen, BioWare's Creative Director. "We've always been interested in the MMO space, since even the UO days, because we all played UO when it came out. It's one of those games that actually helped delay some of our products. Personally, I've played UO, EverQuest, WoW, City of Heroes, Conan, Warhammer... I've always felt that it's a genre that is much more interesting than any other genre, because it's so epic. An MMO has a different scope than any other game out there. It allows you to create this huge world. I have a bit of a rep at BioWare for wanting to create ridiculously huge games, like Baldur's Gate II... I went a little crazy in that game. But getting to work on an MMO? You have to make it a huge game! So I get to unleash my desire to create so much content that it's ridiculous! And anyway, if BioWare's going to get into the MMO market,

what's a bigger way to do it than with the *KotOR* licence? It's the obvious choice."

Not so obvious, though, that they're rushing in blindly. SOE's mistakes taken into account - Galaxies was always an awkward mix of Ultima Online and EverQuest-inspired principles, which toppled over the edge when SOE tried to modernise it - they're pursuing a more action-based, World of Warcraft-type approach. It's a pretty safe model, given the combined popularity of WoW and Star Wars, but Ohlen's determined to innovate: specifically, he's targeting the dearth of meaningful story content in MMOs. "All modern-day MMOs have done some storytelling," he concedes. "You know, they do have quests, and quest chains, and even class-specific quest chains, but what we've decided to do is [to] make [the] story a much bigger focus of the game, and put a lot of work and energy into it. Your class story arc is as compelling as you'd see in any singleplayer BioWare game. And we feel, by doing that, we're going to, essentially, bring the

Fourth Pillar of [the] story. So, other MMOs have [a] story, but we feel we're going to bring a lot of innovation to it, and it's going to be so much more compelling than what's been seen before. But MMOs have always been RPGs. They are RPGs at their heart, so I don't think it's unusual to try to add in story to a genre that's essentially related to the RPG."

With this in mind, BioWare is encouraging punters to view *The Old Republic* not just as *WoW* for those who hiss "I've got a bad feeling about this" when stuck in traffic, but also as a sequel, of sorts, to *Knights* of the Old Republic II. Of course, losing the "Knights of" from *The Old Republic's* title isn't just for brevity's sake: in the MMO, you'll be able to play as any number of Star Wars archetypes. "I'm a giant fan of *Knights*," says Ohlen, "which I guess is unsurprising, as I was its lead designer. But it's not just a game I loved to build; it's one I love to play. The problem with it, though, was that if you didn't want to be a Jedi, there











was nothing else. So, The Old Republic really allows you to have a whole bunch of KotOR stuff that you get to choose from at the beginning of the game. You're going to be playing through storylines that will appeal to you as a KotOR fan, but it's much bigger in scope, and each one is going to be focused on a particular class. So if you enjoyed KotOR, but you have a Han Solo fetish or a Boba Fett fetish... Well, I'm not going to talk about exact classes, but just imagine the major Star Wars characters who aren't Jedi or Sith. We want to give you the opportunity to play those."

The danger in this, of course, is that the path of Luke and Anakin will prove all too tempting for the majority of players. It's a natural rite of passage for the player base of every MMO to pick a favoured race and/or class - think EverQuest's Dark Elves, World of Warcraft's Night Elf Hunters, and Guild Wars' Rangers – but in the Star Wars universe, the obvious choice is a pretty toxic one. After all, the Jedi are meant to be an exclusive sect: if everyone has a lightsaber, no one's a Jedi. Before SOE's misguided meddling, Star Wars Galaxies addressed this problem by making Jedi-hood nigh on unattainable. BioWare won't comment on this, but Ohlen assures that regardless of players' class preferences, they'll be

presented with the sort of twisting, multilinear, morally dense plotlines for which his company is well known, but which are largely absent from the MMO market.

Crucial to these plotlines are your companion characters. Since Baldur's Gate, BioWare has paid utmost attention to the player's 'party', and has gone to great lengths to make his companions as believable, well written, and interactive as possible. Now they're doing the same - in an MMO. "We've taken a lot of the basics from in terms of how we do storytelling and companion characters," Ohlen explains, "and how relationships work with companion characters from previous BioWare games. But because this is an MMO, we've had to do different things in terms of how you control your character. And also, we recognise that some players don't like pets. You know, some players don't like that gameplay paradigm, so what we've been making sure to do is provide - well, every player is going to have a companion character, but we're providing with the characters. Hopefully, what we're doing will bring a lot of innovation to the MMO space, so that even people who don't think they would have liked to have a

companion character will, actually."

It's a bold claim, but if Ohlen turns out to be right, there's another fear: what if the NPC companions are so compelling that players will be disinclined to engage worried. "I don't think so," he shrugs. "We have a lot of other gameplay systems that are going to encourage group play. Group play isn't going to be necessary, because if you want to play our game and play it from beginning to end, without grouping you're going to be able to do that. But at the same time, we know it's an MMO, and we have to encourage grouping. So we have systems that encourage players to group. We even have companion systems that are going to encourage players to group!"

How, then, will other players factor into the player's personal storyline? Prior to The Old Republic, BioWare designers had the luxury of an offline and relatively linear game in which to create their vast, epic stories: players could make far-reaching, world-changing decisions because there wasn't a second (or third, or fourth, or millionth) player to be upset by them. Lead Content Producer Dallas Dickinson explains that players will be interacting with two different "layers" of narrative. "When you think about it," he says, "in the Star Wars











movies, there were personal journeys, and then there was also the journey of the world going on there. So, Han Solo's story of running from Jabba the Hutt is Han Solo's story; however, he also contributes to the destruction of the Death Star. So, there will be stories that are more global – they have more to do with the struggle between the Republic and the Sith, and that is a much broader story. That's not the personal story – that we call the 'class story' – but you'll be able to participate in that greater struggle, and there are systems there that have much more world impact because that'll be a world story."

Ohlen adds, "We can do a lot with the player's personal journey affecting the world around him. And he'll feel the effects of his choices permanently. What's a planet we can talk about... Well, we can't have a situation where the player blows up Korriban. We can't have stories in that manner, but we do have situations where players can choose between killing or sparing important characters. For example, at one point, playing a Sith character, you're sent to track down an important young Jedi Padawan who's come to pre-eminence. When you finally track her down, you can choose whether you want to kill her, or, basically torture

her and convert her to the Dark Side. And you'll have a different experience later on in the game because of it."

Because players tend to invest a lot of time and energy in their MMO characters, though, BioWare's not going to be too punitive with regards to their storyline choices. Gameplay will reportedly be affected by one's path through their class story, but only inasmuch as your experience will be different from another player's, rather than better or worse. "And we don't Dickinson laughs. "We don't want people going on Allakhazam, or whatever, and looking for the right one to pick. Or spend a long time trying to work out which is the light path and which is the dark path. What seems like a nice thing to say probably is a nice thing to say. There'll be no 'gotcha!' situations where you finish the conversation and go, 'Oh, man! I should've chosen Node A! My game is ruined!

As in KotOR, your behaviour will affect your ties to both the Jedi and Sith factions. While Ohlen can't yet clarify just how those factions will fit into TOR in a gameplay sense, he's able to admit that, "... it can affect how your character progresses, your abilities, your skills, what things are available to you in the game – item-wise,

perhaps – and also, obviously, from an aesthetic standpoint. Just as in *Knights*, your skin and aura will change according to your light side/dark side choices. But even then, it's going to affect you differently if you're a Jedi or Sith than if you were one of the non Force-using classes, and we have many of those."

Ohlen can't discuss how the opposing factions will be interacting with each other - or how that will represent itself in the game world, such as through - but he does seem to hint at something sister studio, we've been looking at all the different systems they developed for their game. We're allowed to look at their design; we've been speaking to their designers and programmers, and we've been looking at their PvP, so that's going to help us in the future make sure our PvP is really good as well. I can't go into detail about our PvP system, but yeah, we have the two factions - the Sith Empire and the Galactic Republic – and obviously they hate each other, and players on those different sides are going to be... in conflict.

If that's all a little vague for you, it may well be because the systems in question







O37 NAG







will undergo radical changes prior to the game's release. And according to Ohlen, this isn't as much of a hassle as it's been in previous BioWare titles, thanks to the engine they're using. Developed by Simutronics for the upcoming Hero's Journey, the HeroEngine has proven to be an extremely versatile and robust MMO development tool for BioWare. "It's a really good engine," Ohlen enthuses. where everyone can make changes and edits to the game on the fly, and everyone else can see those edits on the fly. So, it allows for a much more collaborative development environment. Designers and artists can be working together - a designer can say, 'Hey, we need to change the position of this building,' and the building is changed instantly. Actually, just a few weeks ago, I was playing one of the closes – that I can't talk about! - and I was on IM with the combat designer, and this part of the balance is really good; we need to speed this element up, and five seconds later it happened, right on my screen. He was editing it in real time, responding to my feedback.

Dickinson agrees. "It's a very powerful

toolset for rapid prototyping. To see that the game we're thinking we're going to make is the game we're going to make is very powerful. And it's a real boon to development when you can actually test out your theories pretty rapidly, so you don't go two years down a path and then say, 'Oh, by the way, now we turn combat on,' and it's horrible."

That's unlikely to happen. If nothing is at this juncture - it should be obvious that BioWare's taking every precaution to ensure The Old Republic lives up to the hype that birthed the project in the company to do for the MMO what it did for RPGs, and given the conscientious - if a little dispiritingly risk-averse - approach it's taking, there's not much to suggest it won't. Whether or not The Old Republic reaches World of Warcraft's highs or Star Wars Galaxies lows, there's a nice you have more power over the games industry than you know. While I can't desire for a Night Trap sequel, there's nothing to suggest you can't make it happen. Get typing. NAG













THE TRACKS

Note: The Death Magnetic DLC for Guitar Hero III/World Touralso works in GH: Metallica.

METALLICA TRACKS

- All Nightmare Long
- Creeping Death
- Dyers Eve
- Fade To Black

- Fight Fire with Fire For Whom the Bell Tolls
- Fuel
- Hit the Lights
- King Nothing
- Master of Puppets Mercyful Fate (Medley)
- No Leaf Clover Nothing Else Matters
- One
- Sad but True
- The Memory Remains
 The Shortest Straw
- The Thing That Should Not Be
- The Unforgiven Welcome Home (Sanitarium)

Whiplash

Wherever I May Roam

OTHER ARTISTS

- Alice in Chains No Excuses
- Corrosion of Conformity Albatross
- Foo Fighters Stacked Actors

- Kyuss Demon Cleaner
- Lynyrd Skynyrd Tuesdays Gone Machine Head Beautiful Mourning Mastodon Blood and Thunder
- Mercyful Fate Evil
- Michael Schenker Group
- Armed and Ready
- Motorhead Ace of Spades
- Queen Stone Cold Crazy
- Samhain Mother of Mercy Slayer - War Ensemble

- Mommy's Little Monster Suicidal Tendencies War Inside My

- System of a Down Toxicity
 The Sword Black River
 Thin Lizzy The Boys Are Back in Town

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EVER EXPANDING

The story of how Assault on Dark Athena came to be is an interesting one. The developers were originally remaking Escape from Butcher's Bayon an updated game engine, because Microsoft could not make the Xbox 360 backwards compatible with Escape from Butcher's Bay (which was available for the original Xbox console); and the developers wanted the original game's story to be experienced by a much larger audience. However, as the development cycle continued to progress, and the developers added more and more content to the already stellar first game. they slowly came to realise that they had enough new content to create a seguel to Escape from Butcher's Bay. Thus, Assault on Dark Athena was born.







THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ASSAULT ON DARK ATHENA

HE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: Escape from Butcher Bay was a massive success among gamers and critics alike when it was released back in 2004. The mixture of stealth and gunplay, together with some light RPG elements catapulted the game into the limelight. The only complaints among those who played it were those focussed around the somewhat short single-player campaign and the lack of multiplayer. Assault on Dark Athena is a sequel to Escape from Butcher Bay, with Vin Diesel once again providing his voice and likeness to the title. This sequel is said to offer an extra ten hours of play (on top of that offered by the original title, which is being bundled with Assault on Dark Athena - don't be confused, just check the box outs). We didn't get a chance to play the updated original title, but reports from those who have seen it in action indicate that it's aged well. We did, however, get the opportunity to go hands on with a preview build of Assault on Dark Athena, and we have to say, it's looking pretty damn slick.

on the Dark Athena, a mercenary ship that is captained by a woman named Revas.

who seems to be hell bent on making Riddick's (and the player's) life difficult. The sequel features the same play dynamic (of sneakiness one second and all-out bullet spraying the next) that we saw in the first title, but with what seems to be an even heavier emphasis on stealth and melee combat. From the look of things. guns won't be easy to come by in Assault on Dark Athena, and when you do manage the game is gearing up to launch an all-out abuse from guys touting guns and you'll often find yourself bleeding out on the metal causeways of the Dark Athena if you choose to run and gun exclusively. One of the first enemies that Riddick encounters on the

Dark Athena is one of the many drones that patrol the passageways of the ship. These chumps have guns where their arms are supposed to be, meaning that you can't grab their weapons and use them for your (however, you can grab the drone's body and drag it around with you to use its gun, but this severely limits your movement and is only recommended in an emergency).



In Assault on Dark Athena, the key is to hide in the shadows to watch your enemy's routine and then pounce when his back is turned (complete with gruesome execution animations). The sequel maintains the original's control scheme and much of the techniques that were present therein.

Crouching in the shadows still causes the screen to be covered in a hazy blue filter to let you know that you are currently nearly invisible to the enemy. The melee combat is once again quite visceral and incredibly brutal, and during our playtime we clubbed enemies over the noggin, we when all else failed, a simple punch to the face took them down Riddick's hands become covered in blood as fights rage on, and the bodies of foes are quite literally covered in slashes and tears by the time they drop. It's definitely not for kids or for those with an aversion to violence. You'll occasionally be running errands throughout the ship for various characters; performing little odd jobs here and there (such as delivering the tooth of one of the ship's inhabitants to an allied character, which Riddick... well, let's just say he





performs field dentistry). Addressing the complaint of a lack of multiplayer in the original title, the developers have seen fit to grace us with some very interesting multiplayer modes that gamers can take part in. The most intriguing of these modes is called Pitch Black. In this mode, one player assumes the role of Riddick and every other player is cast as a random mercenary. The mercenary's objective is simply to kill Riddick, but there's a catch: the player playing Riddick is in an area that is shrouded in complete (absolutely complete, as in truly pitch black) darkness.

This means that the mercenaries (whose only source of light are the muzzle flashes of their guns and gun-mounted flashlights) are to face Riddick in his element, and we're certain that if Riddick is controlled by a skilled player, this game mode could prove to be quite intense. The game's visuals and audio (which is comprised mostly of the low rumbling of Mr Diesel's gruff voice) are already spot on in the early build we received, so the only thing that's left to see is whether or not the game's style will appeal to a new audience. NAG

Dane Remendes



WII









WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR II

WHEN IT COMES TO real-time strategy games, Relic is one developer that has a habit of breaking the mould. From its humble beginnings with the space RTS, Homeworld to the massive success of the Dawn of War series, Relic has consistently challenged the norms and tradition of the genre, redefining common concepts such as base building, resource gathering and unit management with almost every release they put on the shelves. Now, with Dawn of War II, they've taken those concepts and shaken them up even further.

The DoW II campaign gives players an up-close look at the inner workings of an elite Space Marine Strike Team. As a part of the Blood Raven chapter, your team will travel from planet to planet to tackle complex tasks that require a deft hand and careful timing above the all-out savagery we became familiar with in the first game.

What that means, in short, is that base building and resource management, as you know it, is out. The mission structure will also be rather different to the common, linear fashion gamers might be used to in their RTSs. Players will control a powerful Space Marine Strike Cruiser that will serve as interplanetary transport and a central point to gather one's thoughts and wargear between missions, as well as providing orbital deployment of both reinforcements and the occasional bombardment.

Players will need to think in terms of the overall strategy and occupation of territories, as well as the tactical battles themselves if they plan to survive through the 20+ hours of the campaign that spans almost 60 missions - over half of which are optional. Adding to the recent trend of cooperative play, the single-player campaign will also allow players to team



up with a buddy for the entire duration. Things get especially interesting when you look at the population limitations, however, since the game is only designed to be played with a handful of three-man squads. If you bring a friend into battle with you, each player will only have two or three squads to handle, catering for an intensely tactical play dynamic and a close bond between the players and their limited number of troops. With such a strong focus on unit micromanagement (as opposed to the traditional combination of both unit and base micromanagement) courtesy of a large number of unit abilities combined with the RPG system and population limits, one could easily cast aside the 'real-time' side of things and declare DoW II a pure tactical strategy game - much like the UFO series and its predecessor, X-COM.

It's not all strange new territory for





Dawn of War; you may be pleased to know. The multiplayer mode gives players a more familiar resource and basebuilding mechanic to deal with, but will - of course - be given the Relic treatment. Instead of having a range of buildings for producing various units and technologies, players will have two main structures (with a few others available depending on your commander of choice): their headquarters, which produce all units and give you access to a dead-simple, threetiered technology research system; and generators, which can only be built around captured power points once they've been reinforced. Resources, namely requisition and power, are gathered by capturing and holding specific points around the map, much the same as in the first DoW or Company of Heroes. While veteran RTS players might think this all sounds a

little primitive, fear not: the complexity of micromanagement is still present in the squad abilities, and the effort required to hold those strategic points is not to be snubbed; enough to keep even the most experienced gamers on their toes from the first battle to the last.

While things have certainly been given a makeover, the game is still undoubtedly Dawn of War. Even more so, it's undoubtedly Warhammer 40K. The shift of emphasis to the importance of units over mindless spamming has reinforced the idea of what Warhammer is all about: careful and cunning tactics, deception, and strategic flexibility. We're expecting to see great things coming from this brand. Though, at the very least, it'll keep RTS players busy until StarCraft II hits our shores. NAG

Geoff Burrows

RACIAL TENSIONS

While the original *Dawn of War* ended its run of expansions with an unprecedented nine races to choose from, its first release only had four. We have high hopes that Chaos will make a return in future expansions, but until then, you'll just have to put up with the avesome power of the Tyrapids.

Space Marines: Under the rule of the immortal Emperor, this genetically enhanced race of fearless warriors performs its military duties with zeal unmatched by any race but the hive-minded Tyranids. Donning (or often permanently bonded to) their power suits, the Space Marines operate in small squads of elite troops, with a weapons-based answer to any tactical situation.

Orks: Formed as part of a cruel genetic experiment by an ancient extinct race known only as Brain Boyz, the Orks of today are a brutal race that spans across more planets than any other species in the universe. They fight because they enjoy it, and they wage century-long wars for the same reason. Wielding crude, looted, slapped-together weapons, the Orks have neither allies nor masters and will destroy anything in their path.

Tyranids: The long-awaited race that (many say) gave rise to StarCraft's Zerg, the Tyranids are finally gracing the Essence Engine thanks to a number of technical improvements that Relic claim were necessary to do the race justice. This insect-like race relies on psychic energies and powerful Synapse Creatures to carry the will of the Hive forward. While this creates a single deadly force that obliterates whole planets, the tactical removal of a few key Synapse Creatures will leave the remaining Tyranids either scratching their heads in confusion or simply running amok.

Eldar: This ancient race of Elf-like humanoids relies on manipulation of the Warp (the almost magical force that flows through the universe), deception and highly-advanced technology to make up for their lack of brute strength. They fight with determination and resolve and make use of powerful hovering vehicles and mighty gods to tackle the tougher situations.

I'D LIKE SOME RPG WITH THAT

Players will have access to a handful of three-man squads for their campaign missions, each highly specialised and capable of extreme combat feats, led by a unique and fearless leader. These leaders can be customised with individual weapons, armour and artefacts, collectively known as wargear, that are acquired during missions from a variety of sources. Leaders and their squads will also gain experience from their actions in combat: each level they gain unlocks assignable skill points that will shape the player's forces into a finely honed and distinctive army, giving the title great replay value.

















KILLZONE 2

BACK IN 2004, WHEN the first *Killzone* (which was a PS2 exclusive) was released, many critics and gamers were anticipating that it was going to take the title of 'King of Console Shooters' away from Master Chief and the Halo series. However, all this speculation took place before the game was released, and when PS2 gamers got their first real taste of a game that they'd only really learnt anything about by word of mouth and not hands-on experiences, they realised that the title was not worthy of the hype that preceded it. The game was technically sound, but many called the play dynamic mediocre and uninspired. With Killzone 2, Netherlandsbased developer Guerrilla Games hopes to show the world that their first attempt at creating a Halo killer was merely their way of testing the genre's waters, and that they will had a chance to put a preview build of the title through its paces, and I have to say that ${\it Halo}$ is going to have to watch its back... Killzone 2 is here and it's looking to throw a wrench in the works..

The first thing I noticed when starting up the preview code for Killzone 2 is the game's phenomenal graphics. It's definitely one of

the best-looking console FPSs out there (even in the incomplete state of the preview build). The story told in the second game involves the ISA (Interplanetary Strategic Alliance) taking the fight to Helghan, the home planet of the Helghast. This is where you come in, as Sergeant Tomas "Sev" Sevchenko, a member of Alpha Team, which is a special-forces unit that is dropped behind enemy lines when the assault on Helghan begins. What the ISA come to realise is that the Helghast are using their home planet's harsh environment as a weapon against the invaders, turning all of the planet's natural attributes against them. The game plays much like you'd expect from a first-person shooter, but it has an indescribable quality that makes the game superbly exciting. The action is fast and frenetic, the controls are what you'd expect from a console FPS, and the game is looking technologically incredible. From what little I have played of the campaign, all I can really say is that if you have a PS3 and you love console shooters, you should start getting very, very excited for this one.

Dane Remendes









TESTOSTERONE R US

The members of Alpha Squad are the stereotypical action heroes. Gruff voices, liberal use of colourful language and gung-ho antics are the order of the day when these guys enter the fray. Let us introduce you to them:

SERGEANT 1ST CLASS TOMAS "SEV" SEVCHENKO

The playable character and probably the most level headed of Alpha Squad's members; Sev believes that it is his patriotic duty to defend his home from the Helghast's oppression. He's a natural born leader and enjoys the occasional lap dance, but whatever. Patriotism!

MASTER SERGEANT "RICO" VELASQUEZ

This perpetually angry fellow is a battle-hardened veteran of the war

on Vekta and holds a particularly nasty grudge against the Helghast, most likely because they massacred his former unit. He now heads up Alpha squad and likes singing in the rain. Vengeance!

LANCE CORPORAL "DANTE" GARZA

It's a proven fact that every specialforces squad needs someone like Dante. You know... that guy who every other member of the squad likes to make fun of because he likes poetry and legwarmers. Dante is Alpha's sniper and technical specialist – if something needs fixing or someone needs to have their head blown off by someone sitting a kilometre away, then Dante's your man. He also has a spectacular collection of romance novels, but whatever. Wisecracks!

CORPORAL SHAWN "NATKO"

The king of potty mouths, Natko is an experienced soldier with no desire to command or lead. He is Alpha's demolitions expert and hand-to-hand specialist. He's a big fan of licking inanimate objects, but whatever. [Insert profanity here]!



GET OFF MY SERVER, NOOB!

Killzone 2's multiplayer component allows 32 players to duke it out online in an intense, teamwork-orientated game mode called Warzone. Warzone offers a dynamic experience in that multiple game types are played in a single round. The five different game modes are Assassination, Search & Retrieve, Search & Destroy, Bodycount, and Capture & Hold. What all this means is that in a single play session on one of the game's maps, you could play a number of different game modes. One moment your objective may be to assassinate a key member of the opposing team, the next you could simply be attempting to rack up as many kills as possible. It's a great concept, so here's to hoping that the execution is just as great in the final build. Vehicles play a role in multiplayer and the increased protection they provide is sure to make using them a treat. The class-based multiplayer employs a level-up system – players will gain experience and new abilities/weapons as they play - and each faction (ISA and Helghast) has their own variant of the following classes:

ENGINEER

This tech-savvy dude has the ability to deploy turrets and later on gains the ability to repair weapons caches and gun turrets in the field.

MEDIC

The medicine man of the future is said to carry a magical gun that heals fallen teammates, negating the need for them to respawn back at their base. This class also gains the ability to drop health packs for teammates.

SCOUT

Carrying a sniper rifle and equipped with a cloaking field (which renders this guy invisible when not moving), this class is all about long-range action. Later this class gains the ability to tag enemies and reveal their location to teammates.

INFANTRY/RIFLEMAN

These grunts are the most basic class. They have no unique abilities, but can carry almost any weapon.

ASSAUL'

The Assault class packs a grenade launcher to make some Really Big Explosions™ and is equipped with better armour for extra protection. He runs slower than the other soldiers, but fear not: the Assault class gains the ability to run faster when he has sufficient experience.

TACTICIAN

This guy likes to pretend he's some kind of fancy field commander and has the ability to drop smoke grenades that'll allow friendly troops to spawn at their location. He also gains the ability to call in air support in the form of a sentry drone.

SABOTEUR

Being extra sneaky is the Saboteur's specialty and every time he spawns, he is disguised as an enemy class. Later he can drop mines to get a few frags.



TOM CLANCY'S H.A.W.X.

OM CLANCY'S DETAILED AND violent future world paints a grim picture. The world is ravaged by war and chaos; terrorist organisations almost outnumber the remaining militant forces, and weak economies shave precious dollars off global defence spending. The world still needs warriors, however - it needs troops on the ground and birds in the air to protect the free nations. Enter the PMCs, or Private Military Companies - groups of mercenaries who range from ragtag guns-for-hire to established multi-billion-dollar organisations. These PMCs not only resolve conflicts and keep otherwise defenceless nations in one piece, they also remove much of the political responsibility tied to invasion and other acts of war, ultimately leading to a more chaotic and war-torn world than ever before.

The game takes place in Clancy's year 2012 - set between the events in Ghost Recon Advanced Warfighter 2 and EndWar. If you're familiar with either game, you'll find plenty of references to both, including an appearance by GRAW 2's Scott Mitchell. As the world becomes increasingly dependent on these PMCs, they grow in power and influence, until eventually one of them builds up the resources and courage to take on the United States in an all-out attempt to conquer it. When this happens, H.A.W.X. is thrown into action as they leave their globetrotting moneymaking and return to the US to help the floundering nation make its last stand.

The action in H.A.W.X. takes place all across the world, spanning 16 locations throughout South America, Africa, the Middle East, Japan and a number of US locations including Washington DC, Chicago and Los Angeles. Missions range from protecting an oil refinery in the Middle East to evening out the odds in Rio de Janeiro, taking down enemy helicopters, fighters, bombers, ground troops and even naval units. Players will fly thousands of metres above the locations, each faithfully recreated courtesy of GeoEye's high-definition satellite imagery. The mission locations look fantastic. Rolling hills, craggy mountains and sprawling cities hide enemy tanks and infantry, while endless oceans meet the horizon miles away. Some of the maps measure up to a massive 10,000km² and can take as long as four minutes to fly across at full thrust.

To help the player perform his mercenary duties is a selection of over 50 high-tech and painstakingly detailed fighter jets from ages past to those of Clancy's sci-fi-esque future. Each aircraft flies and handles differently and offers differing levels of control and manoeuvrability, with certain craft being more suitable for certain missions. Additionally, players can choose a customised load-out of guided bombs, missiles, rocket pods and more to tackle any situation the game will throw at them.

Geoff Burrows



SHARING IS CARING

There's nothing quite like knowing your wingman has your back. While the game's AI will certainly do everything it ideally want a human being holding the position and that's exactly what H.A.W.X. will allow you to do. The entire campaign can be played cooperatively with up to three other players, and the system allows for drop-in, drop-out multiplayer in case you can't hold together a decent squadron. No confirmation is available yet on whether or not split-screen play is available, but by the looks of the interface, we're assuming it would be difficult to get such a feature working as well as one would want. Eight-player deathmatch is also available, allowing players to battle each other in the skies customisable load-outs







THE GODFATHER 2

WHEN ELECTRONIC ARTS RELEASED the original Godfather game in 2006, it was a momentous occasion. The normally cautious EA moved into an entirely new level of gaming, moving away from their traditional, family-friendly approach and producing a title that well deserved the M rating it got. In fact, the game led to EA releasing a whole bunch of games full of violence and bad language.

It's hardly surprising that the company is producing a sequel to the title – just as unsurprising as the fact that it has enjoyed a delay in its release date. The new Godfather game, simply called The Godfather 2, is a logical progression from the first, while still following the storyline of the films to a large degree. While there are definite similarities between the two titles, there are also a number of improvements that, if they make it into the final code, will have fans jumping for joy.

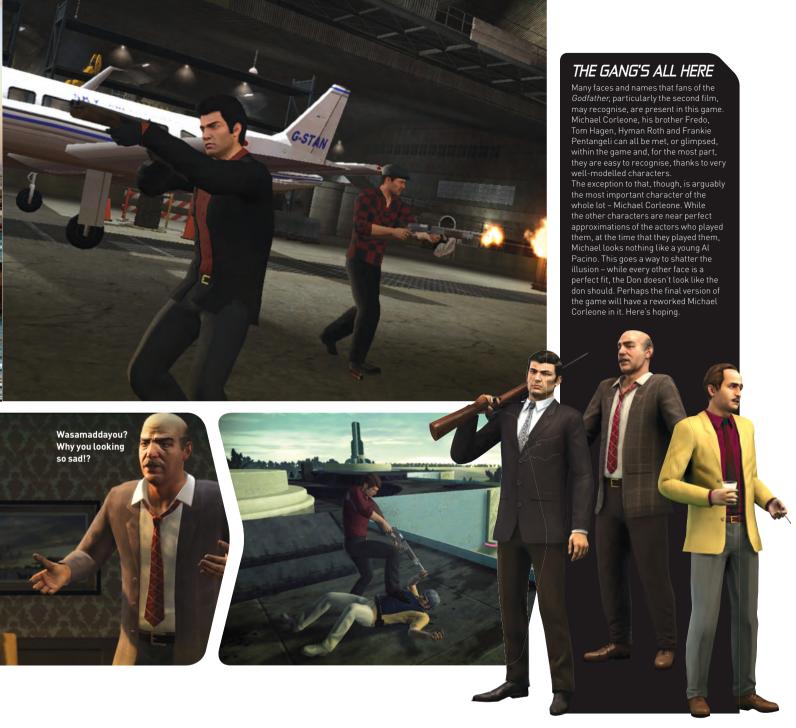
While the first Godfather game saw the player slowly rising through the ranks as a mob enforcer, hoping to one day achieve the lofty status of something near a mob boss, the second title will circumvent that entire process. After a brief mission helping Don Michael Corleone escape from Cuba during that country's tumultuous revolution, that player's character, named Dominic, becomes a boss right away. But the power and promise that the position holds still need to be earned - the player may be imbued with the don's trust, but he will still need to build his reputation, family and empire to reach even loftier positions than before

Because the game will need the player to be in a more powerful position, it will also ask the player to do something a little different – manage his empire. We're not talking a SimCity level of management here... essentially, the player's



management role consists of shifting muscle around, as well as recruiting trusted crewmembers to fill up his family 'tree'. Naturally, the game will also need the player to acquire new 'business' interests, and the familiar dynamic of extortion, pressure and low-grade strongarming makes a welcome return.

Business will work a little differently, though: the player will be able to control two types of businesses – rackets and fronts. Rackets, like drugs or prostitution, will allow the player to make a basic income, as well as get associated bonuses like brass knuckles, bulletproof vests and armoured cars. Fronts, on the other hand, will modify the base income, increasing the money earned through laundering activities. Businesses will also need to be guarded, so a low level of financial management enters into the title as well. Guards cost money, after all, and the player will need to balance



income and expenditure on a very simple scale to make sure that businesses have enough guards, while he is still earning good cash.

The player's crew is a slightly different matter. These characters are specialists in various fields, like safe cracking, arson and first aid. The player will be able to take a number of crewmembers along on any job, allowing for better muscle and bigger gun battles. Choosing the right crewmember for a particular job will be vital at times. In addition, the player will be able to improve crew members, making them more formidable, although some improvements will only be available if the player plays in online multiplayer games with his crew.

Crewmembers form a vital part of the game's management aspect, as well as the power struggle that the player will undergo with rival families. The player can send crewmembers out to defend locations (they

are tougher than normal guards) and to attack enemy installations, all from the game's 'Don's View' management screen. The player will also be able to eliminate the crewmembers of rival families, although he will need to do favours for people to discover the kill condition' for each crewmember. These characters need to be executed in specific ways, to send the right kind of message.

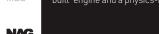
The Godfather 2 will largely be what the player wants it to be. There are missions to perform, of course, but the freeform game dynamic will allow the player to run around (or drive around) various cities and cause a little havoc. The environments aren't the largest around (from what we've seen), but there will be a number of cities for the player to conquer, adding to the variety and challenge of this game.

With lots of weapons, locked content and upgradable characters, as well as a lot to do, *The Godfather 2* is looking like a

very promising crime simulator indeed. The added management elements of the game make it something a little different from other free-roaming crime sprees, and the player will have better control over their business interests and their crews. The code we played was solid and the game is already enjoyable, but the delay obviously means that there are still a few more tweaks in the works. Hopefully the graphics will be spiced up just a little – although good, they weren't quite what we hoped they would be when we looked at the game... although the flame and explosion effects are fantastic.

Fans of the first game should certainly be keeping an eye out for this one, as should those who like their visceral and brutal violence tempered with a bit of management, strategising and thought. **NAG**

Walt Pretorius





FIGHT NIGHT ROUNI

'M FAIRLY CERTAIN THAT there'll be few non sports fans out there who will jump for joy at the mention of a new boxing title about to hit the shelves. It's understandable: the prospect of playing a game based on a sport in which one may have zero interest might to babysit your little sister on a Friday night. Fight Night Round 3 managed to change all that, however, with its focus on creating a genuinely entertaining fighting game, while still managing to maintain plenty of the highly technical boxing simulation elements a seasoned fan would expect from such a game – and FNR4 is set to take that legacy

Boasting a roster of over 40 licensed fighters, including Mike Tyson's first videogame appearance in almost ten years, FNR4 will take many of the fundamental elements laid down by its predecessor, such as the training and RPG-type aspects of boxer simulation and working your way up through the ranks, and expand on them. Players will be able to fight across all recognised divisions, battle it out for multiple titles, and do it all as their favourite fighter from almost any period in boxing history - from Muhammad Ali onwards.

Each boxer will have their own unique fighting style, carefully captured by the developers so that their digital counterparts won't just move and punch like the real deal, but their ring entrances, attitude and personality will come through at every opportunity. Using a completely 'scratchbuilt' engine and a physics-based animation

system, fighters will no longer be limited to simple trigger-based combat moves. Glancing blows, knockouts and all manner of offence and defence will be simulated down to the bones, making for a more dynamic and believable fight that requires as much attention to movement and defence as it does to slugging away with the haymakers. Players can also expect to face off against not only tougher fighters, but ones that are more intelligent as well. The AI has been given a massive overhaul, taking into account adrenaline, fatigue, footwork, and careful timing, in much the same way as a human player would behave. You'll need to be on your toes and ready to mix up any strategies on the fly if things aren't going your way.

What made FNR3 so interesting was the control system: using the dual analogue sticks to simulate lower- and upper-body movement. You'll be pleased, no doubt, to know the system is making a return, but plenty of tweaks and refinement will enhance the feeling of bashing someone's face in even more.

While the realistic violence and content might put plenty of people off, it's going to be interesting to see how gamers treat this game once it hits the shelves. FNR3 was easily the best boxing game I've ever and jaw-dropping visuals; so the presence of a revamped career system, physicsbased fighting and plenty more toys to play with can hopefully only improve upon the previous title. NAG

Geoff Burrows



















EAT LEAD: THE RETURN OF MATT HAZARD

SQUEALED LIKE A TEN-YEAR-OLD schoolgirl when I heard there was a new Matt Hazard game on its way. Serials*. I played Marathon Software's original eight-bit side-scrolling romp, Adventures of Matt in Hazard Land, over at the local arcade when I was just a toddler, because my ultra liberal parents were blithely indifferent to its widespread condemnation as "one of the most unnecessarily bloody games ever made". In 1992, Matt Hazard 3D revolutionised the gaming world with its ground-breaking and entirely unprecedented 3D visuals, shamelessly imitated and rarely surpassed by just about every single FPS released since, including Wolfenstein 3D, Doom, Quake, Unreal and Killzone 2. Built on an enhanced version of the Matt Hazard 3D engine, the 1999 multiplayer deathmatch blowout, Matt Hazard: Alien Assassination Arena, is still the first (and only) choice for lunchtime fun in the NAG offices. If you've never played a Matt Hazard game, you shouldn't even be reading this magazine, you faker. We're refunding your subscription.

Well, that's what the Eat Lead: The Return of Matt Hazard's marketing

campaign would reasonably lead anyone to believe anyway. See, despite touting a formidably impressive franchise legacy spanning 25 years and twelve release titles, the legendary Matt Hazard has never actually existed, ever. Something of a pity perhaps, because I'd totally hit up a game called Goonzilla Versus Mega-Matt.

So the big idea when D3 Publisher and Vicious Cycle Software sat down to develop their new game was to poke fun at gaming clichés. "Without revealing too much, I'll just say that our goal all along has been to create a homage to the gaming industry that sparks nostalgia for the last 25 years," said D3 marketing manager, Sam Guilloud. "The back catalogue of Matt Hazard assets we've released, including some eyebrow-raising box art, screenshots, Websites, and other marketing materials, are here to remind us all of some of the most infamous moments in gaming history. As gamers ourselves, our intention has never been to flay sacred cows, but we also know that we're ready for some direct parody of the games and past marketing campaigns we all grew up with. Gaming's a lifelong hobby, so we want to tap

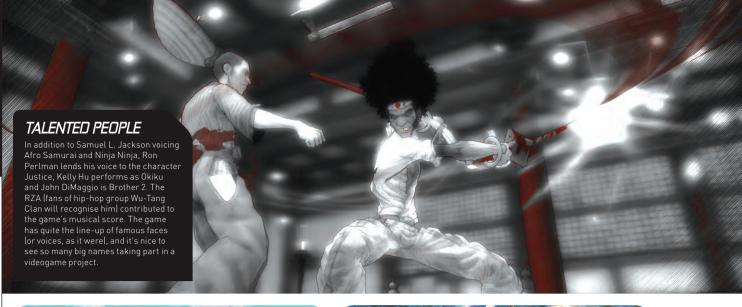
into everyone who fondly remembers the milestones we've referenced." But will the game be released on 5½-inch floppy disks?

Story details are still about as scarce as the Matt Hazard Battle Chest, but it all has something to do with the erstwhile not-superstar finding himself trapped in his next-generation debut by disgruntled software company CEO, Wally Wellesley, and squaring off against a quarter century's worth of former nemeses, including Captain Carpenter and Master Chef. The game features the voice talents of Will Arnett (Arrested Development) and Neil Patrick Harris (perennially haunted by the gruesome spectre of Doogie Houser M.D., but more recently in How I Met Your Mother, and the cult Web video series, Dr Horrible's Sing-Along Blog) as hero and villain respectively. NAG

Tarryn van der Byl

* This is supposed to mean "seriously"... these Internet freaks are trying to reinvent English so that one day you won't be able to understand anything your kids are saying. Apparently, at that stage you become an 'old fart' or probably 'old f4it', Ed...









SAMUEL L. JACKSON IS so cool that I was tempted to give this game 96% right off the bat (even though this is only a preview), purely based on the level of awesome that a game featuring Jackson is propelled to. Apparently, I can't do that, though, so I'll just fill you in on the game's important bits. The game is based on and follows the story of the hit anime series of the same name, but I won't divulge any of the story points here to prevent any spoilers that may creep in. What I'll mention is the fun that I had while taking a preview build of Afro Samurai for a spin.

Afro Samurai is an uncomplicated, nononsense brawler that is quite beautiful to see in motion. Cel-shaded graphics power the game's stylised look and contribute to the phenomenally over-thetop violence. There aren't many moments in Afro Samurai where blood is simply being spilled. Blood explodes/erupts/is vomited from every possible orifice of the slashed-up bodies of Afro's foes, and it's safe to say that the developers didn't have a young audience in mind when developing this game. We wouldn't want it any other way, though, since the anime is similarly violent. Combat is your typical action brawler fare: buttons for light attacks, heavy attacks, foot-to-face attacks and blocking are provided. Basic combat is only as complicated as you want it to

be, since there are tons of combos that can be utilised but aren't necessary to deliver a decent rear-end kicking. Battling normal enemies isn't terribly challenging (although there are boss enemies), but the game succeeds at making you feel like a skilled samurai by throwing dozens of pansy-ass foes at you who can be easily killed and dismembered in a visually spectacular fashion. Attack modifiers are available and are accessed by building up Focus. This is done by chaining combos together and once you've built up enough Focus, you can hold the left trigger to slow down time and charge up attacks that are laced with extra brutality. Alternatively, Focus can be used to unleash Afro on his enemies in a spectacular display of speed and agility as he flies around the screen rendering enemies immobile. There are also mild platform bits interspersed throughout the game's levels, while an advancement system allows Afro to gain experience and ensures that his abilities evolve as you play. The game mechanics don't seem as if they're going to be terribly complicated, but the time that I spent with the preview code was highly enjoyable. Fans of the anime and newcomers looking for a fun brawler should be looking forward to the March release date. NAG

Dane Remendes





FIGHTING WITH IDEAS



gaming mouse



gaming mouse



gaming KB



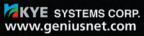
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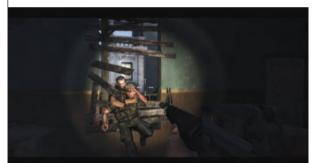
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SHELLSHOCK 2: BLOOD TRAILS

SURVIVAL HORROR IS A genre that has many potential settings. We have seen the deserted streets of mysterious towns and the deserted back alleys of massive cities. We have seen hulking space ships in the farflung future, and the dingy villages of 1920s New England. Now we'll get the chance to see just how horrific war can be.

Shellshock 2: Blood Trails is the sequel to Shellshock: Nam '67, which was released in 2004. But from what Eidos are saying about this upcoming title, it will be a successor in name alone. The spirit of the previous title has been changed for this new instalment, and other than title and setting, there won't be too many similarities. That's probably a good thing – if memory serves correctly, not too many people liked the original title.

The story behind Shellshock 2 sounds quite interesting. The press release states: "At the height of the Vietnam War, a covert ops cargo plane carrying a top-secret consignment known only as 'Whiteknight' is lost over the deepest,

uncharted jungles. Special Ops soldiers are immediately dispatched to the scene to retrieve the top-secret shipment and one-by-one they disappear without a trace... until one month later, one of them suddenly walks out of the jungle. Crazed and deranged, something in the jungle had ripped out his humanity, poisoning his soul. Something in the darkness had driven him mad... and followed him out." It sounds very good, actually, and could prove to be a very novel experience. Then again, time will be the judge.

"Shellshock 2: Blood Trails takes players to a Vietnam War unlike any they will have experienced before. This is a war where your enemy doesn't just want you dead... it wants to rip you to pieces," said Lee Singleton, General Manager of Eidos Games Studios, according to a press release. "As the infected turn one-by-one, your instinct to fight becomes an instinct for flight, to leave the real horror of this war far behind."

These are big claims – they always are in

press releases – and it will be interesting to see if the embattled publisher can pull them off. Initial screen shots look promising, but there is only so much that can be gleaned from static visuals.

The idea has masses of potential, but for the most part Vietnam has never done too well as a videogame setting, for some reason. This new approach may add the element of terror that it needs, but we are talking about a publisher who has been known to fail quite spectacularly on what should have been "sure things" in the past [do we need to bring Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness up again?).

Still, we need to be at least a little hopeful here. Once again, this is a great concept, and if the development team pulls it off, we shall have a great gaming experience on our hands. The combination of dank jungles, confined tunnels and horrific enemies makes for a great plan on paper, after all.

Walt Pretorius



















TRINE

TRINE IS JUST A posh word for "trio". Now that we have the hard lexical stuff out of the way, the trine in question refers, with an ingenious bit of double entendre, to the game's triplet heroes as well as some magical mystery device that the threesome's epic quest is all about. I'm sure someone in the writing department got a cupcake.

Anyway, actual narrative details are still rather sketchy, but the basic idea is that there's this kingdom wobbling on the craggy precipice of some great and terrible peril (aren't they all?), and it's up to these three protagonists to win the day. Boldly declining to stray, for the moment, from its classical *Choose Your Own Adventure* catalogue oeuvre, *Trine's* titular champs are a wizard, a thief and a warrior. It's the next part where this collection of class 12 fantasy clichés erupts from its mouldering cocoon; unfurling great iridescent wings shaped like something really unexpected - like maybe a dachshund with a frying pan.

Trine's platform world, you see, abounds in many elaborate and subtly implausible obstacles (humongous logs swinging eternally of some unseen, occult volition, for example) and it will take all the cleverly coordinated tricks and trades of your team to negotiate their collective way from A to B. The wizard can conjure up all sorts of nifty floating boxes and platforms, while the thief has a fancy grapple and some hot, ranged weaponry. When all sophisticated artifice is exhausted, the warrior bashes things. And if that doesn't work, they can try to do all that stuff in a different order.

"Switching between the three characters is a core idea of the gameplay, but the player has a lot of freedom in using them," explained developer Frozenbyte's CEO, Lauri Hyvärinen. "Most puzzles and situations can be solved with any character or any combination of two characters. Every puzzle has a solution that is the hardest to figure out but [which] allows the 'smoothest' solution, and they also have the

most obvious solution, which is usually the hardest to execute. Ultimately the player gets to pick and choose his own solution."

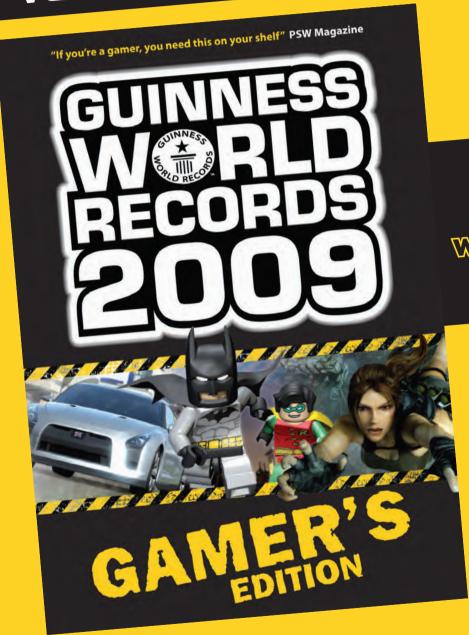
It's as if Quest for Glory and Lost Vikings met at a dinner party, and decided to have a weird kid that looks quite a lot like Overlord. After the extraordinary adventure that was last year's XBLA wonder, Braid, however, we should all love and cuddle and encourage what might well be the renaissance of innovative side-scrolling platform gaming before another crap Sonic game ruins everything.

The game is currently scheduled for PC and PSN release, although a slot on Microsoft's Xbox LIVE Arcade hasn't been ruled out. **NAG**

Tarryn van der Byl

- Late fourteenth century Middle English, from original Latin trinus via Old French trin(e), meaning "threefold". Wait, come back! I really am an interesting person.
- ² Alternately, David Eddings-grade.

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reviews

WHAT WE'RE

The epic battre continues! Call of Duty: World at War reclaims the top spot from Quake III: Arena once again! With a map pack on the way, which promises more Nazi zombies, there's a good chance it'll still be No. 1 in April. Too bad we actually have to put out a magazine each month.





| Rank | Game |
|------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Call of Duty: World at War |
| 2 | Quake III: Arena |
| 3 | Skate 2 |
| 4 | Left 4 Dead |
| 5 | Need for Speed Undercover |
| 6 | Mirror's Edge |
| 7 | Rock Band 2 |
| 8 | GTA IV |
| 9 | Battlefield Bad Company |
| 10 | DJ Max Fever |
| 11 | King's Quest Collection |
| 12 | Unreal Tournament III |
| 13 | Scene IT 2 |
| 14 | DJ Max Portable - Black Square |
| 15 | Far Cry 2 |
| 16 | Fallout 3 |
| 17 | Dead Space |
| 18 | Quake Live Beta |
| 19 | Guitar Hero World Tour |
| 20 | Burnout Paradise |
| 21 | Sacred 2 |
| 22 | Rumbel Massage |
| 23 | LittleBigPlanet |
| 24 | Gears of War 2 |
| 25 | R-Type |
| 26 | Hexic HD |
| 27 | Gears of War |
| 28 | Fallen Sword |
| 29 | Rolando |
| 30 | MK vs. DC Universe |

ANATOMY OF A REVIEW

A quick guide to the NAG Reviews section

VITAL INFO: Where to get it, what it costs and who you need.

PC SPEC: Our rating for the hardware requirements of games is space age. Check the box on the other page.

GAME NAME: This end up. The bit you tell your friends. The bit you remember – with your brain!

AWARDS: Our awards mean something: it means we agreed on a game, which is rare,



THINK INSIDE THE BOX

ICONS: It's just like a superultra mini-review: you just glance and learn!

> **BOTTOM LINE:** Too many words, not enough pictures? Don't worry – we'll bottom-line it for ya.



PLATFORMS: Check it: new coloured-tabbed system showing which systems the game appears on and which one we reviewed it on.

LIKE, Y'KNOW, STUFF: We try to keep things in perspective using these two blocks.

SCORE: Sometimes it's a number (usually it is).
Sometimes it's a picture, or something snarky. We like to mix things up a little.

WEB SCORES

RESISTANCE 2 [PS3



| NAG | 85/100 |
|--------------|--------|
| METACRITIC | 87/100 |
| GAMERANKINGS | 87/100 |

LOTR: CONQUEST [PC



| NAG | 68/100 |
|--------------|--------|
| METACRITIC | 59/100 |
| GAMERANKINGS | 49/100 |

RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS [PS:



| NAG | 62/100 |
|--------------|--------|
| METACRITIC | 58/100 |
| GAMERANKINGS | 62/100 |

THE REVIEW ICONS

The NAG review icons aim to help you get a better idea of what a game is like.



ACTION: When you gotta blast, smash, crash and mash your way to victory, it's Action.



BABYSITTING: Put the kids to bed, you gotta Babysit this game to make it love you.



BITCHIN': When a game just plain rocks despite everything, then it is worthy of the Bitchin'



BORING: Grab your blankie and teddy, we might be in for some Boring to put you to sleep.



BUGGY: Truth be told, there is just no excusing a Buggy game because games aren't cheap



BUTTON MASHER: Using only the power of your manly thumb, you can beat this game, Button Masher.



CASH-IN/LICENSE: Some companies totally Cash-in on License games, good or bad.



CINEMATIC: Sweet-ass cutscenes, dramatic camerawork and awesome scenes are Cinematic.



CLONE: We've seen it before and we'll see it again, because people always Clone good stuff.



CO-OP: It is dangerous to go alone. Take this. A friend. Water with cooperation for Co-op Attack.



COMPETITIVE: You don't think Ranked Match is a feature: you think it should be mandatory.



FOREIGN: No clue what the game is about or even what is said? Confusing plot? It's Foreign!



MULTIPLAYER: The maximum number of people who can play per copy of the game.



ONLINE: For games that play well with others and generally mean playing with others, Online.



PARTY: Get some friends and move the couch, Party games are frikkin' sweet.



PIECE OF POO: Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you just can't squeeze a diamond out of a turd.



STUPID PEOPLE: Don't worry little buddy, this game holds your hand

WILL IT RUN? – PC GAME SPECS

PC game specs are a pain for us, because we need to list them for those people who don't consult the box before buying a game. Instead, the reviews will now have a nice number ranking on the side. Higher numbers mean a game is more machine intensive. If a game has all the numbers lit up, it'll run on a 5-year-old piece of junk up to the most bad-ass of machines.

- 5 Your machine has a DirectX 10 graphics card, a dual-core or higher CPU and 2GB or more RAM. You are the centre of gaming-fu. This game will honour your investment. [DX10 graphics card; dual/quad-core CPU; 2GB+ RAM]
- Your graphics card has a respectable 256MB of memory and your CPU sits at the higher end of 2GHz, backed by 1-2GB of RAM. A worthy rig for a worthy game. [256MB graphics card with DX9; 2GHz or more; 1-2GB RAM]
- 3 Your card sits between 128 and 256MB of RAM with at least DirectX 8 support, while your 2GHz Pentium 4 churns happily with between 512MB and 1GB of RAM. We assume you're slowly saving for an upgrade.

[256MB+ graphics card with DX8; 2GHz Pentium 4; 512MB-1GB RAM]

2 Okay, so you have a graphics card that falls below the 128MB memory point but supports DX8, a chip that you can't call 2GHz even if you wanted and you have 256MB or less RAM. Your PC might be getting more Office action than you'd like to admit

[128MB or lower graphics card with DX8; Below 2GHz chip; 256MB or lower RAM] 1 You really don't think about your PC specs much. In fact, any hint of upgrade

money is spent on something more practical, like a coffee maker with a timer. Fresh coffee first thing in the morning always beats playing games. [Can run XP, will play game]

NAG AWARDS

Must Play award is that it can happen anywhere, with any game, good or bad. Somehow, you must play this game.





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| NAG | 90/100 |
|--------------|--------|
| METACRITIC | 80/100 |
| GAMERANKINGS | 81/100 |



| · · | - |
|--------------|--------|
| NAG | 82/100 |
| METACRITIC | 81/100 |
| GAMERANKINGS | 82/100 |



| NAG | 81/100 |
|--------------|--------|
| METACRITIC | 70/100 |
| GAMERANKINGS | 74/100 |

063

THE REVIEWERS

So what has the crew of the Battlestar Naglactica been doing, after discovering that the world ended and the final Cylon is not who anyone thought it would be? Let's find out!

MIKTAR DRACON

It was fun while it lasted, but huffing prophecies, Miktar could no longer be President Miktar spends most of his time wondering why Michael the table



WALT PRETORIUS

When not talking to himself. pretending he has a hot girlfriend, Walt likes to sit in front of his fan club talking about spirituality and what Occasionally Walt takes



holiday aboard the Crippled Cylon Base ship.

DANE REMENDES

Having discovered he's one of to relax with heavy drinking and heavy reminiscing about he's taken to exploring the Battlestar Naglactica air vents, for no good



Now that Tarryn knows frakking planet, Tarryn is sure just who she frakking is

CHRIS BISTLINE

Finally over discovering that he's not crazy – he's just a Cylon and that's the reason he's totally alone. Chris likes to hang out with Michael and reminisce about old times



before the war, when a toaster just made toast.

MICHAEL JAMES

Michael's Day: Wake up. Brush mirror until reflection blinks Read documents on desk while grunting occasionally. Head down to the CIC and stare at Chris while Chris stares back Prevent civil uprising and fend off rebel Cylons Drink heavily. Bed.

ADAM LIEBMAN

since the Internet discovered he's married to a Cylon. The strangers are enough to make even him rethink his decision to



GEOFF BURROWS

Every day Geoff tries on a ever-changing moods. The cancer has taken most of his body hair, so he decided to go ahead with the gender-change operation. It's so much more fun reading the Book of Prophecies when you have breasts







RESISTANCE 2

RENOWNED DEVELOPERS INSOMNIAC GAMES bring us the follow-up to their highly

successful shooter, and PS3 launch title, Resistance: Fall of Man. The original title was one of the best console shooters around when it was released two years ago, offering not only a very robust single-player campaign, but also a very well-polished multiplayer experience, all set against the bleak backdrop of an alien viral infection and hordes of monsters that had set about methodically laying waste to an alternate-history Europe. The sequel, Resistance 2, is set in 1953, and once again follows the story of the first game's protagonist, Nathan Hale, as he fights alongside what's left of the human race, as it tries to thwart the advances of the malevolent Chimera. This time around, the Chimera forces are mounting a full-scale assault against the United States, attacking simultaneously from the east and west. Hale soon joins up with the elite SRPA, an agency dedicated to combating the Chimera, and is then deployed alongside a group of Sentinels (soldiers who, like Hale, have been partially infected with the Chimera virus, granting them some superhuman abilities such as health regeneration) to combat humankind's deadliest threat.

The story, of course, is pretty generic for the genre, though it's sufficiently cohesive to tie all the action together, with snippets of information scattered throughout the game's levels that reveal details about such things as the government's mysterious Project Abraham, and the group known as the Cloven. The snippets are undoubtedly intriguing, though the story could undoubtedly have been presented in a more emotionally involving way. The developers unfortunately missed out on a number of opportunities to develop some of the characters, particularly the members of Hale's elite squadron - there are times when the game begins to delve into their back-stories, but this is short-lived, and those details are never fully expanded upon. There are also a number of plot points that are never really fleshed-out or explained, leaving the player with as many unanswered questions as the first game did.

Of course, in most shooters, the story is merely a formality that provides a setting for all the action, and action is one area where *Resistance 2* most certainly doesn't fail to deliver. The single-player campaign is set over eight chapters, one of which is the prologue, and each of these is packed with epic battles on an absolutely grand scale. There have



been some slight changes made to the game dynamic of the original: in this instalment, there is no health bar, but rather a Call of Dutyesque mechanic that tells you to seek cover and regenerate by blurring the screen edges and turning them red. Hale is also now only able to carry two weapons at a time, though the game provides an arsenal expansive enough to uphold Insomniac's reputation for creativity and diversity in weapons. Favourites such as the Carbine and the Bullseye make their return, and there are new additions such as the saw blade-spewing Splicer, the Marksman sniper rifle, and the satisfyingly powerful .44 Magnum. Each weapon also has a secondary fire capability that gives it additional abilities - for example, the Magnum fires shells that can be detonated by remote control, while the Bullseye fires homing projectiles.

The most significant thing about actually playing *Resistance 2* is the sheer magnitude of the game: everything in the title is huge, from the legions of basic Chimera troops that the game throws at you, to the impossibly large bosses you'll face throughout the campaign. Although the boss fights are arguably less challenging than slicing through the hordes of smaller enemies you'll face on the way, it's still







incredibly satisfying to take down the towering Chimeran behemoths.

Resistance 2 also mixes things up somewhat with its multiplayer mode. In addition to the 60-player simultaneous Skirmish mode, where players are divided up into squads and given various objectives to compete for, Resistance 2 also offers an intriguing cooperative mode, which puts a team of up to eight players together in a mission with a sequence of randomised objectives that ensures no two play-throughs are ever identical. Players can choose characters from one of three classes, namely Spec Ops, who specialise in long-range attacks, Medics, who can drain health from enemies, and Soldiers, who boast more health and endurance than the other classes. The beauty of the mode is that players have to truly work together in order to succeed - the Spec Ops guy can dish out ammunition to his teammates, while the Soldier can activate a force field to allow the squad to push deeper into enemy territory. It's a carefully balanced mode that rewards cooperation, and it makes for incredibly satisfying play. What makes this mode even more engrossing is the experience points system that awards you points that

can be used to unlock new weaponry, gear to customise your character's appearance, and special Berserk abilities, not dissimilar to *Call of Duty's* 'Perks'.

When it comes to visuals, Resistance 2 is undoubtedly impressive. Although it's haunted by some clipping issues and the occasionally blurry texture, the game does well to maintain a perfectly solid frame rate, irrespective of the amount of action going on on-screen. The characters are well detailed and designed, and the visual effects are impressive, as are the majority of the locales. The sound effects are convincing, at times disturbingly so, and the voice acting is decent if not remarkable. The action is tied together with a suitably grand soundtrack that fits the tone of the game to a tee.

Resistance 2 does well to improve and expand upon the achievements of its predecessor, offering a lengthy and engrossing single-player campaign, as well as an expansive multiplayer mode, all wrapped up in a well-polished package. It maintains the feel of the original, while also introducing some innovative new features that make Resistance 2 one of the best shooters the PS3 has seen to date.

Adam Liebman







THE LORD OF THE RINGS: CONQUEST

WHEN IT COMES TO licensed games, it seems that developers have the habit of being a bit lazy. Most of these less-thanstellar games based on popular licences tend to either rely too heavily on their brand and skip out on a solid game, or deviate too far from their origins and alienate their players. Every now and then, however, someone gets the balance right. This is what almost happened with Lord of the Rings: Conquest.

Pandemic Studios, the developer responsible for the excellent Star Wars: Battlefront and its sequel, is no stranger to the creation of team-based multiplayer action games. Conquest follows the basic blueprints of SWB almost to the letter, but mixes it up with melee combat, an entertaining single-player campaign, and a handful of annoying design choices and omissions

Taking place across all three books

and making liberal use of movie footage, Conquest's single-player campaigns are divided between Good and Evil, with each taking about three hours to complete. The Good campaign sees the player taking on the roles of all your favourite characters from the story, as well as plenty of common soldiers in the struggle we should all be familiar with by now - to destroy the One Ring. On the flipside, things get a little more interesting. The Evil campaign sees you playing as anything from the Nazgul to Balrog to the Big Bad himself, in an effort to destroy Frodo and his annoying accomplices, take back the One Ring and crush all those who oppose the might of Sauron - all culminating in a bout of joyous Hobbit-kicking at the Shire. While the Good campaign is a little 'been there, done that', the Evil campaign is a delight to play, and it's interesting to see how existing story elements and movie assets have been cut

and wangled to allow for what is essentially a completely opposite story.

In Conquest, the basic mode of play involves players spawning at captured locations as the class of their choice, rampaging through hordes of enemies to capture the next point, and moving through the scenarios in a sort of 'spawn, kill, die, repeat' manner. The difference between the single-player (and LAN co-op) and the main online multiplayer modes is that in single player, you're capturing critical locations such as the main wall of Helm's Deep or performing other specific objectives. The multiplayer modes have players running around arena-like versions of the maps to either gain control of as many flag points as possible, or find and hang onto the One Ring (die, and your player drops it for the enemy to snatch up). There is no way to play through the scenarios themselves





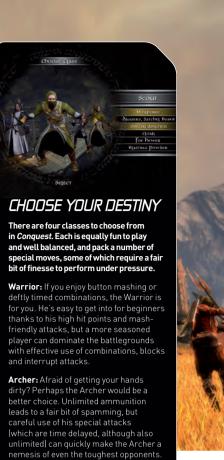


in online multiplayer, and frankly, that's just silly. The only other multiplayer mode is deathmatch, which is a mode lost in a game like Conquest with its emphasis on strategic play and cat-and-mouse attacks and counter-attacks. However, things aren't all grim in multiplayer: the few game modes on offer are spiced up by the presence of hero units, siege weapons, horseback (and Wargback) combat, towering Ents and hideous Trolls - even the occasional Giant Hawk or Fell Beast. Aside from the flyers, each can be controlled by the players, and the addition of these special units adds a completely new dimension of strategy to the game in a similar manner to tanks and other vehicles in games such as Tribes or Call of Duty.

The biggest problem with Conquest is that it's about four or five years too late. Many of the systems that gamers have come to expect from their online gaming

are missing. There are no persistent stats or customisation, very few game modes and inferior server browsing. You could play a hundred games and they'd all feel much the same. And there's too much allowance for button mashing and spamming to let the veterans stand their ground if a particular game is filled with newcomers. The lack of online scenario play is unforgivable, and the aggravation is furthered with all other online game modes being limited to 16 players - significantly undercutting the epic feel of the campaigns. On top of the button mashing, combat also tends to feel as if it's bogged down in jelly. Perhaps it's lag tolerance (which the game does surprisingly well, given the focus on melee), or simply a timing issue with the animations: it's difficult to really feel as if you're slugging an Uruk-hai across the face with your giant. flaming sword. NAG

Geoff Burrows





Scout: While he can dish out almost as much damage as the Warrior in close combat, the Scout's real prowess lies in the shadows. His stealth ability grants him an instant-kill backstab if he can get the timing right, and dive-rolls and other evasive manoeuvres allow him to escape danger when things haven't quite gone

Mage: The most versatile class in the game, but also the one with the most damning weak points. The Mage serves as both healer and medium-range damage dealer, using a combination of spells that range from chain lightning to a protective shield. Having a good Mage player on your team is the key to success

according to plan.









RISE OF THE ARGONAUTS

NTENDED AS A COMBINATION of the action and RPG genres, Liquid Entertainment's Rise of the Argonauts tells the tale of Jason, the famous king of the mythical isle of Lolcus, and his quest to retrieve the fabled Golden Fleece. The story does, however, make a few departures from the one traditionally told in Greek Mythology - the game opens with a touching scene between Jason and his wife-to-be, Alceme. A mysterious assassin whose poison-tipped arrow fatally wounds Jason's fiancée soon interrupts the moment. Jason then begins his search across ancient Greece for the Golden Fleece, the only relic powerful enough to revive his fallen love. Of course, the plot soon deepens, as the links between the shadowy assassin's clandestine employers and the Golden Fleece itself are gradually revealed.

The game plays similarly to many other third-person action titles available, with a few small RPG-style elements thrown into the mix. The player controls Jason, who spends his time running around the various environments, engaging in dialogue and combat with a variety of characters, including the likes of Titans, satyrs and centaurs. You'll also pick up various companions during the course of your travels, such as the brutishly strong Hercules and the speedy Atalanta. These

companions will aid you in battle, though they're entirely autonomous – you'll unfortunately never get a chance to control any of them directly, or even issue orders to your teammates.

The combat is fairly typical to the genre. Jason has access to a spear, a sword and a mace, with more powerful versions of these three weapons becoming available as he progresses through the game. In addition to the rudimentary ability to dodge and block attacks (courtesy of his indestructible shield), Jason can string together combinations of light and heavy attacks, as well as being able to switch weapons in the middle of a string for a multiple-weapon combo attack. As is more often the case than not with third-person action titles, the combat never demands much more from the player than simple button mashing in order to execute effective attacks. Nonetheless, Jason's moves do look good; especially the brutal kill moves that he'll perform when his foes are low on health. Although the combat system isn't especially deep, it does make for some enjoyable moments - provided one can forgive the drops in frame rate that occasionally accompany some of the bigger battles that Jason engages in.

In a twist on the typical style of skill

progression in action games, Rise of the Argonauts allows you to 'dedicate' certain accomplishments (such as killing a particular number of enemies, or reaching a certain milestone in the storyline) to one of Jason's four patron deities, namely Hermes, Ares, Athena and Apollo. After dedicating sufficient accomplishments to any particular deity, you'll unlock points that can be spent on new fighting abilities, known in the game as Aspects - some of these are passive, like faster health regeneration, while others allow you to perform devastating special attacks, at the cost of a long recharge period before they can be used again. The abilities are unlocked along a skill tree that gives you access to increasingly powerful abilities as you progress through the game. It's an innovative system that allows players a degree of customisation over the protagonist, though it never comes close to approaching the depth of character development seen in pure RPGs.

For all the aptitude of the combat system, it's a shame that players aren't given more of a chance to play around with it, since the number of combat sequences in *Rise of the Argonauts* is greatly overshadowed by time spent simply running around the different locales and engaging in dialogue









with various characters. The most pressing issue with this is that despite the game's robust storyline, there are too many little niggles that prevent it from becoming truly immersive. Although the various environments might look good, traversing them without the aid of a mini-map soon becomes tedious, forcing the player to pause the game and select the map option far too frequently. The other major problem is that for a game so heavily focused on its storyline, Rise of the Argonauts suffers terribly because of poor scripting and dull voice acting. There are scattered moments when the dialogue is well delivered and engrossing, but for the majority of the game, the lines are at best formulaic and at worst utterly laughable. Worse still is that although many of the dialogues allow you some choice as to the kind of response Jason makes, the majority of these dialogue options seem to have little bearing on the game's progression, and feel more like a formality than anything else.

Visually, some of the environments are especially well designed, though there are instances when textures become blurry at close distances. The character design, too, is a mixed bag, with some models looking truly convincing while others are simply too stylistically overdone to fit in with the

game's sombre undertones. The stuttering frame rate that plagues some of the busier battles also does the game no favours: it's not enough to make things unplayable, but it's sufficiently distracting to disrupt the flow of the game. In terms of the audio, the sound effects are convincing and passable, while the soundtrack fares far better than the voice acting, with a fittingly sweeping score that's appropriate for the game's epic setting.

Ultimately, Rise of the Argonauts feels more like a missed opportunity than anything else. It has an exciting premise, interesting characters, and a setting of epic proportions, but it simply fails to deliver, with much of that potential remaining untapped. Poor voice acting detracts from what could otherwise have been an incredibly immersive story, while the half-baked RPG elements of exploration and conversation are prominent enough to overshadow the enjoyable combat sequences, without ever being sufficiently developed to be enjoyable in their own right. Rise of the Argonauts certainly isn't short on innovative ideas. It's just disappointing that the way in which they've been implemented isn't better... preventing this mediocre action-RPG title from reaching the heights that it could have. NAG

Adam Liebman









MIRROR'S EDGE

ARROR'S EDGE IS DIFFERENT. Everything about it is a change from the current norm. It's played in the first person, but the focus isn't on guns and explosions. It's a current-generation game, but it's colourful and there're no post-apocalyptic greys or browns in sight. It offers a unique new perspective on what can be done when a developer takes an original idea and runs with it, despite the risks and liabilities that such a title imposes.

The PC version of *Mirror's Edge* is no different to the console versions. The biggest new addition is the PhysX support, which adds an array of fancy physics-enabled objects to the game world. This enhances the experience somewhat, but doesn't alter the game dynamic. From what I've seen of the console versions, the game definitely seems easier to play with a mouse and keyboard. Some may argue that it makes the game too easy, but it also eases the frustration of having to replay segments of the game a few hundred times [that's a lot, Ed] before finally getting it right. Don't get me wrong though: the game is still uncompromisingly tough at times and can be as frustrating as trying to build a nuke out of paperclips and toilet paper. The game is all about momentum, trying to reach your goal in one fluid run to the proverbial finish line without tripping over bricks or diving headfirst into an electric fence along the way. This is complemented by Runner Vision, a game mechanic that turns objects that can be utilised to quickly traverse the urban environment bright red. All manner of everyday objects become

protagonist Faith's means to complete her mission, from zip lines to boxes piled in such a way that they serve as a springboard that allows Faith to propel herself to new heights (literally). The story involves Faith's sister Kate and an attempt by some shady folk to frame her for a murder she did not commit. Naturally, Faith isn't too happy about all this and sets out to clear her sister's name. What follows involves bullets (together with Faith's ability to dodge them), police officers/bad guys and, in an unusual move considering how the combination of the previous factors commonly involves plenty of fight sequences, lots of running away. Sure, there is combat and enemies can be disarmed and subsequently have their weapons turned on them, but Faith is fragile and can't take on an army of enemies. There's also melee combat, but I found myself shying away from it and I attempted to stay as far away from enemies as possible to finish the game without having fired a weapon in an enemy's direction. (Which I eventually managed to do following lots of swearing and cursing at my pursuers, but at least I didn't shoot them.) You can play two extra game modes when you're done with single player. You can do Speed Runs, which task you with getting through the game's levels as quickly as possible; and a Time Trial mode, a checkpoint-based race through certain of the game's environments (both modes come complete with online leader boards and ghosts of your and other players' best runs, which you can compete against). Mirror's Edge is a gorgeous-looking game,



filled with colourful scenery and memorable spectacles. The added PhysX support does make the game world more believable and chaotic; so in my opinion, it was worth the wait for the PC version. The game is fairly short (it'll take you approximately six to eight hours to finish) and it's not going to please fans of big guns and balls-to-the-wall action, but you'll find that it's a fantastic game if it appeals to you. NAG

Dane Remendes



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MOTORSTORM: PACIFIC RIFT

HE ORIGINAL MOTORSTORM WAS

undoubtedly an enjoyable racer, albeit one that was a little rough around the edges, having been a slightly rushed PS3 launch title. The sequel, Pacific Rift, aims to provide the same level of chaotic enjoyment as the original did, while ironing out the odd bug and introducing a few new features... and it succeeds quite remarkably.

The core dynamic of the game hasn't changed since the original: it's still about no-holds-barred off-road action, featuring a variety of different vehicles of various shapes and sizes that battle it out on interactive, 'deformable' tracks. This time around, however, the action is set not in a barren desert, but on a volcanic island in the Pacific, which makes for a much more varied selection of available tracks. The 16 tracks on offer in Pacific Rift (double the number the original offered) are split across four different environments. namely dense jungles, soggy beaches, perilous mountaintops and lava-laden volcanoes. Each environment has its own unique features: pools of water on the beaches will slow vehicles down, but also cool their engines, allowing them to boost freely without the danger of overheating, while thick jungle foliage that might be impassable by a small bike or ATV will present little difficulty to a large Big Rig

These unique features make Pacific Rift's races so enjoyable, since the type of

vehicle you're driving determines the best route for you to take through each of the well-designed courses. Small vehicles like the bike are more agile and manoeuvrable, but might need to take longer routes to avoid impassable obstacles; on the other hand, the newly included Monster Truck class of vehicles can crush smaller opponents with impunity, though they're far less precise when it comes to cornering. Every aspect of the racing in Pacific Rift is a superbly balanced trade-off, forcing you to make quick decisions in races that have a truly dynamic feel to them. Of course, the exaggerated physics that so significantly contribute to the fast pace of the game also results in frequent crashes that can be frustrating, especially while learning the ins and outs of the lengthy tracks.

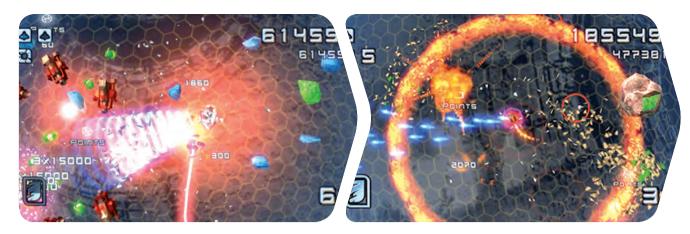
Visually, the new environments are packed with gorgeous textures, giving the game a rich visual aspect, which its bleak desert-set predecessor lacked. The game also manages to hold a steady frame rate, even in the new four-player split-screen mode. Another significant improvement is that while the frustratingly long load times of the original haven't been entirely eradicated, they have been significantly reduced, making for a much more pleasant gaming experience. A hard-hitting licensed rock soundtrack accompanies the suitably aggressive roar of engines, doing well to complement the frenetic racing action.

There's no doubt that Pacific Rift does

well to provide more of the same whiteknuckle enjoyment that its predecessor did, though with a little more variety this time around. Fantastic track design and clever racing mechanics make for a fastpaced racer that, despite its few niggles, is ultimately fun to play. NAG

Adam Liebman





SUPER STARDUST PORTABLE

RRP→ R75 | Publisher→ SCEE | Distributor→ PlayStation Network | Genre→ Shooter | Age Rating→ 3+

FYOU'VE EVER HEARD the song The Final Countdown by Europe, then you already have a pretty good idea of how it feels to play Super Stardust Portable, and how bad haircuts were in 80s. If you haven't, here are a few words that may inadequately express the experience: epic, tense, amazing, powerful, badass – the game, not the haircuts.

Super Stardust Portable is a shooter in the Geometry Wars game style, with three weapon types you cycle through on the fly to combat giant meteors in the atmosphere around Earth. Where the PSP version differs from its PS3 big brother, aside from having less game modes (which are to be added later via an expansion), is that Portable

takes place on a flat grid instead of a sphere around Earth. The grid wraps around at the edges to simulate the same effect, and in some ways benefits from the change.

It runs at a crisp 60fps, which on some levels literally defies belief. There's a new game mode called Impact, which removes weapons but charges your Boost if you slam through enemies and asteroids - essentially a score-attack mode with a combo counter.

The controls have been redesigned for the PSP in very clever ways, simulating the dual-analogue shooter style with the stick and buttons, while tapping buttons causes the shot to 'spread' as if you're wiggling the virtual right stick.

In terms of its price, Super Stardust Portable is a shining example of what the PSP is worthy of. **NAG**

Miktar Dracon









How tough are you?

Can I play, Daddy?
Don't hurt me.
Bring 'em on!
I am Death incarnate!



WOLFENSTEIN 3D

HIS PROBABLY ISN'T WHAT William "B.J." Blazkowicz had in mind when he signed up for WWII. His dreams of sunning on the banks of the Rhine, sipping pilsner and pinching pretty hausfraus' bums while they all sing along to Marlene Dietrich's Greatest Hits have, by a rotten turn of luck, been swapped out for some mad commando-spy stuff that mostly involves infiltrating the Nazi war machine and stealing the plans for Operation Eisenfaust. Only this isn't the Operation Eisenfaust you learned about in Grade 9, the one where Hitler dispatched his pal, Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny, to abduct Miklós Horthy's son, forcing daddy to abdicate as Regent of Hungary, and precipitating the German occupation of that country. No, this is the other, top secret Operation Eisenfaust, the one where the Nazis are breeding top secret undead super mutants in a top secret biological weapons research facility in some top secret location that probably doesn't appear in Where in the Third Reich is Carmen Sandiego because it's so top secret. Write about it in your next history exam, and remember to tell your

teachers that videogames teach you stuff.

Originally released back in 1992, id Software's genre-defining FPS might not have been the first ever 3D first-person game (preceded as it was by a number of prototypical titles, including *Ultima Underworld* and System Shock, as well as the company's own John Carmack's *Catacomb 3D*), but it certainly did everything better, while introducing chain guns to an entire generation of disaffected Gen-X adolescents hungry for pixel blood.

Enormously successful, the game was promptly ported to just about every available platform, including SNES, GBA, 3DO, the Atari Jaguar, Apple II, and Acorn Archimedes*, while unofficial ports were later developed for Linux and Dreamcast following the release of the source code in 1995. Wolfenstein was also released as shareware, allowing it to be widely copied and redistributed. This version included the first of the commercial release's three episodes, Escape from Castle Wolfenstein, totalling ten playable levels. NAG

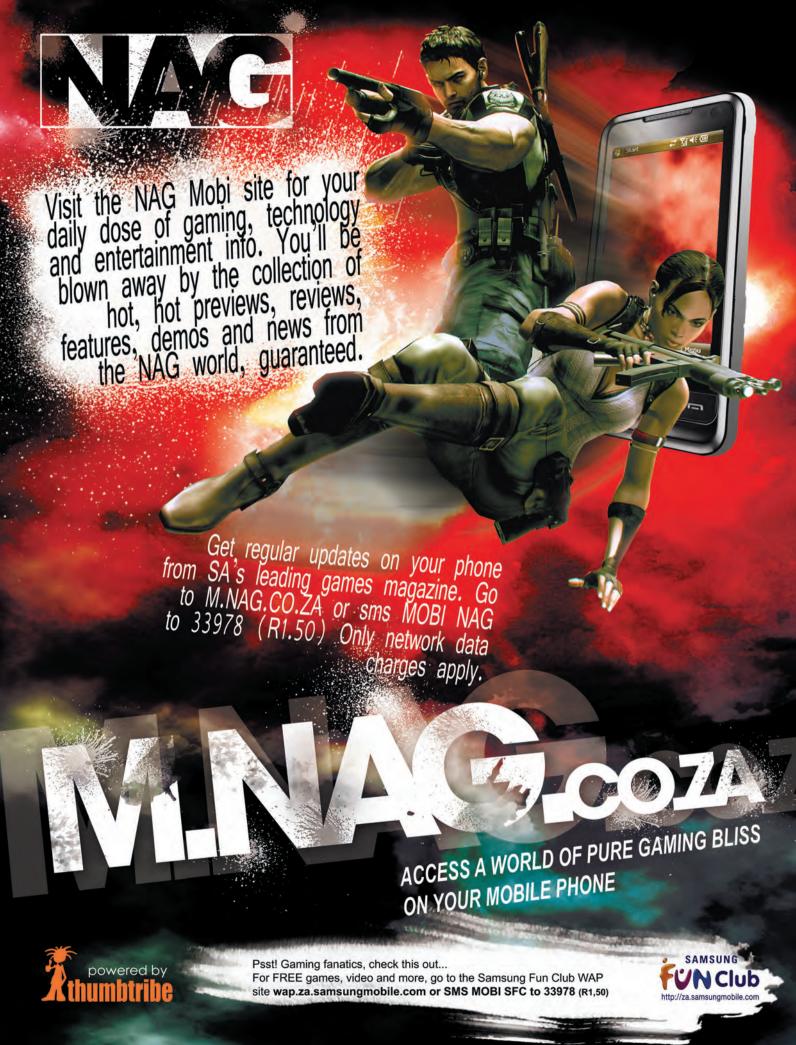
LOOKING BACK EVEN FURTHER

Before Wolfenstein, there was... Wolfenstein. Well, Castle Wolfenstein, a WWII-themed, stealth-based action adventure developed by Muse Software and released on the Apple II way back in 1981. The game was later ported to MS DOS, the Atari 400/800, and the Commodore 64, as well as spawning a sequel, Beyond Castle Wolfenstein. The complete Wolfenstein series includes:

Castle Wolfenstein (1981, Muse Software) Beyond Castle Wolfenstein (1984, Muse Software) Wolfenstein 3D (1992, id Software) Spear of Destiny (1992, id Software) Return to Castle Wolfenstein (2001, id Software) Wolfenstein: Enemy Territory (2003, id Software) Wolfenstein (TBA, id Software)



^{*}We've never heard of that one either. [Let's not throw the word "we" around too much; at some point in my past I actually considered buying one of those. Thankfully, I eventually settled on the Commodore 64 an then the Amiga, Ed]











So, YOU'VE GRABBED THE Suicide Missionary achievement for blowing up the last chunky bits of *Gears of War 2* on Insane difficulty, but have you rolled Horde through to the end of Wave 50 yet? We have, and that's why you pay us forty bucks every month. It buys us enough of those colaflavoured Fizz Pops to get us through all this stuff the hard way, you see, so we can tell you how it's done. Pay attention now, rook.

Each map has some position that is readily defended from all sides, which we've decided to call the "Command Post" (or "CP") because it sounds cool and important and absolutely nothing whatsoever like "hidey hole." While Horde can be played and won on any of the maps shipped with the game (and we've got the Seriously 2.0 achievement progress to show it), our rigorous and extensive lab testing has determined that Jacinto, Pavilion, and Avalanche show the highest probability of huge success. We've marked the Command Posts on each of these maps for your tactical study.

Don't be a glory hound. This is the first and most crucial rule of Horde. There's nothing more infuriating than that one person who always plays Chainsaw Charlie, then bawls for their teammates to tag them back into the game eight seconds later when they're dragging their sorry carcass in between three stampeding Bloodmounts and an enraged Kantus. The Gears that grind together, win Horde together.

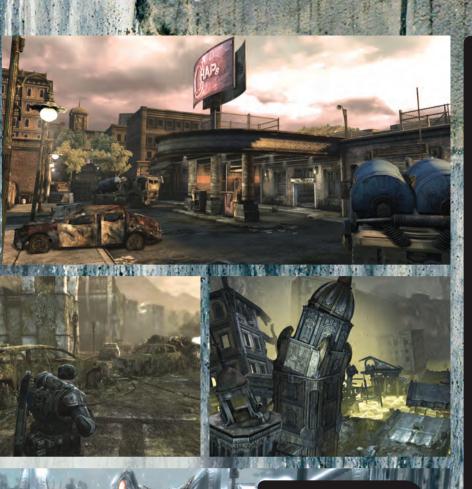
Don't be an ammunition hog, either.
Remember, **nobody** has enough ammunition in Horde, especially in Hardcore and Insane difficulties, so everybody just has to learn to play nice about this. Conserve where you can – chainsaw Sires, punch out Wretches

and Tickers, and grenade tag Maulers to save those valuable slugs, while a single, well-placed shot at a Flamer's tank will quickly eliminate this lumbering threat. A perfectly timed active reload will bump your clip up to anywhere between 18-25% extra damage, depending on the weapon, saving you time, effort, and lots of bullets.

Grab stuff at the end of a wave instead of the beginning of the next. Leave the last remaining Locust or two loping about unmolested, and cram all the ammunition, guns, and stuff you want into your pockets before returning to the CP. Once the next round starts, you have only 15 seconds or so before the Locust spawn into the level, and anything left lying about will magically vanish. Picking up and [re]planting shields will prevent them from being reclaimed by the great invisible repo man.

Waves one to seven are easily overwhelmed, and it's only the last three in each iteration that players really need to chew their nails about. Wave eight introduces the enormous, flail-flailing Maulers, and requisitioning their shields should be of paramount importance. Use these to barricade yourselves inside your Command Post, and make sure you refresh them at the beginning of the next couple of waves. When the Bloodmounts come rampaging triumphantly onto the scene in the tenth wave, they'll stop short in front of the shields, and simply stand there looking stupid while you drill interesting new holes into their respiratory tracts. Pick off the remaining stragglers, now rudely divested of their star cavalry, and that prestigious Hoard the Horde achievement is yours for the taking. NAG





IMPORTANT INTEL

Horde comprises ten unique Locust waves, in five iterations. Each successive iteration increases in difficulty, stacking enemy bonuses according to the following list:

- Waves 1-10: Standard enemy unit health, accuracy, and damage for the
- Waves 11-20: Enemy health is 2X;
- Waves 21-30: Enemy accuracy is now also 2X;
- Waves 31-40: Enemy damage is now also 2X;
- Waves 41-50: Enemy health, accuracy, and damage are now 2.5X (the starting values), and you're all going to die.

JACINTO

Advantages: Respawning poison / frag grenades in the Command Post, and only a single approach for enemies provide excellent prospects for meat corridors o' fun. There's a Boltok / Gorgon pistol just in front of the CP [1], as well as a respawning Longshot / Torque Bow right next to the ammo crate [2].

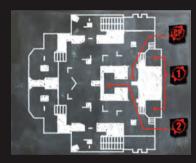
Disadvantages: The CP is small, and if it's suddenly overrun by Maulers, Flamers, or Bloodmounts, everybody is hotdogs. Okay, in theory you could jump over the one-way barrier on the other side of the CP, but we've never seen this fallback strategy work as you're very likely to run straight into a Locust spawn cluster. The nearest ammunition crate can also be a bit of a mad dash in the middle of a wave. There's a Mortar on the map, but it's too far from the CP to be worth the risk of retrieving under most circumstances.



PAVILION

Advantages: A respawning ammunition crate in the Command Post, and Boltok / Gorgon pistols (1) within convenient reach make Pavilion the first choice for handgun snipers. A shield occasionally spawns inside the CP too (2), although it appears to do this according to some erratic and entirely inscrutable schedule of its own (and sometimes even spawns two at once)

Disadvantages: A simultaneous assault from both sides can get very ugly, very quickly. While players can fall back to the small, enclosed courtyard, a single poison grenade can and will end the round before you can say, "Surprise Kantus!" Forget about the Mulcher.



AVALANCHE

Advantages: There's a respawning Mortar in the Command Post, and an ammunition crate within a reasonably safe sprint. The CP is quite large, so a collapsed defence on one side leaves a quick retreat to the other.

Disadvantages: The trade-off for the Mortar is that there's not much else to pick up, and what is there, is inconveniently placed. There are grenades under the gazebo in the middle of the map [1], and a pair of Boltoks / Gorgons [2] on the other side - and that's it. A shield spawns in the back of the truck [3] opposite the CP, according to very much the same schedule as the one on Pavilion.







NVIDIA QUADRO FX 370

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EATURING A REVOLUTIONARY UNIFIED architecture, NVIDIA's entry-level Quadro FX 370 dynamically allocates geometry, shading, and compute-processing power to deliver optimised GPU performance. Featuring a 256MB frame buffer and 16 CUDA* parallel processor cores, the Quadro FX 370 is Microsoft

Microsoft Vista certified on CAD (Computer Aided Design), DCC (Digital Content Creation), and visualisation applications. The Quadro FX 370 enables next-generation, ultra-realistic, real-time OpenGL and Direct X 10 visualisation applications. With two DVI-connectors (one dual-link, one single-link), the Quadro FX 370 offers superb image quality at resolutions up to 2,560 x 1,600 @



60Hz. The FX 370 is designed to deliver the performance, stability, and professional features of high-end Quadro workstation GPUs to small form factor desktop PCs.

*CUDA (Compute Unified Device Architecture) is a parallel computing architecture developed by NVIDIA. CUDA is the compute engine in NVIDIA graphics processing units (GPUs), which is accessible to software developers through industry standard programming languages. Programmers use C for CUDA, compiled through a PathScale Open64 C compiler, to code algorithms for execution on the GPU. CUDA is architected to support all computational interfaces, including C and new open standards such as OpenCL and DX11 Compute.

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The trigger of the pistol acts as the 'B'

button of the Wii Remote, while you continue to use the 'A' button as usual. You can use the pistol for any shooting games that only require the Wii Remote, since it is not possible to connect the nunchuk while the Wii Remote is in the accessory. It's great for games such as Wii Play and Ghost Squad. The iMP Pro Gun Light Pistol is available for R99 at Incredible Connection, Take2, Kalahari and BT Games.

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high glossy front cover combined with a luxurious leather-like reverse side, Samsung's new External Hard Drive S series complements your style. These drives are available in four eye-catching colours and can store up to 500GB of digital content.

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SAPPHIRE HD 4670 GDDR4

SAPPHIRE TECHNOLOGY IS NOW shipping a new version of the SAPPHIRE HD 4670 equipped with GDDR4 memory – bringing new levels of performance to enthusiasts on a budget. The HD 4670 GDDR4 has been production engineered by SAPPHIRE to bring new levels of performance to the mainstream.

The SAPPHIRE HD 4670 GDDR4 features 320 stream processors and 512MB of GDDR4 memory, and the core is clocked at 750MHz and the memory at 1,100MHz (2.2GHz effective), making this the fastest HD 4670 card available. The card is cooled by a new large-diameter, fan-based cooler, which keeps noise levels to the minimum.

The HD 4670 uses the PCI Express Generation 2 interface, and features dual connectors for CrossFireX bridge cables, allowing two or more cards to be used together on a CrossFireX-compatible main board.

SAPPHIRE'S HD 4600 series incorporates the latest ATI AVIVO HD Technology for enhanced video display, and features a new generation of built-in hardware UVD (Unified Video decoder), considerably reducing CPU load and delivering smooth decoding of Blu-ray content for both VC-1 and H.264 codecs, as well as MPEG files.

Product Specifications:

Chipset - HD 4670; ASIC - RV730 XT; Process (Die size) - 55nm;

Transistor Count- 541

million; Memory - 512MB GDDR4; Core Frequency - 750MHz; Memory Frequency (eff.) - 1,100MHz (2.2GHz); Unified Shader Pipelines - 320; Memory Bus - 128-bit; Data Bus - PCI-E 16x; RAMDACs - 2 x 400MHz; Peak Memory Bandwidth - 35.2GB/sec; Video Outputs - VGA / HDMI / DVI-I; API Support - Direct X 10.1 / Shader Model 4.1 / OpenGL 2.0; HDMI Modes - 480p / 720p / 1,080i / 1,080p; Native Display Support - 2,560 x 1,600; 3D Graphics Resolution - 1,024 x 768 - 1,080i



HARDWARE O&A

T'S THAT TIME AGAIN when I discard my current PC and find a new, better one. My only problem is where do I find cheap hardware? I want to use sites like gumtree.co.za but find it could be dangerous and unreliable (the products). What also makes a good new PC? I currently have NVIDIA GeForce 7600 GS and I want something around the 9 series. Help me please.

William Crawford

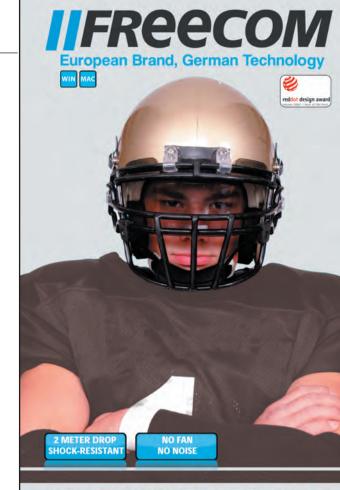
NAG: The best place to look for cheap hardware is on the local forums. Just be sure to buy from reputable people. Look around a bit first and ask others if need be. You can try the Prophecy forums (www.prophecy.co.za) for a start as that's a very lively community with people offloading older hardware all the time.

HAVE A PROBLEM WITH my graphics card. It's a NVIDIA Gainward gaming 7950GT Limited Edition. I've used liquid cooling for a few months and my CPU cooling block got a leak because I made the pipes going to the cooling block

too tight, so it cracked and slowly but surely got bigger. So now my graphics card has a problem. It has a 6-port plug going to the graphics card. It's a power connector. I connected everything and my GPU still performs the same, but the NVIDIA Control Panel keeps popping up a Security alert about that 6-port plug. Some people say I must soak it in benzyne and scrub it. I haven't tried it, but I'm going to. But it would be nice if you can maybe give me some advice that would work. I have the same problem with my previous motherboard. It's a GIGABYTE M55-PLUS-S36.

Franco Bosch

NAG: This could be a failing power supply issue, the graphics card power circuitry could be failing, or a combination of both. Try a different power supply and see what happens. If the result is the same, try the graphics card on another computer, and if that doesn't sort it out, I'm afraid the graphics card may be broken and you may need to RMA it.



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DREAM MACHINE

YOU MAY NOTICE THAT we have removed all the pricing information from our Dream Machine products below. With the current daily fluctuations in exchange rates it is becoming difficult to supply you with up-to-date and accurate prices on hardware. The time lapse between when we compile the information and when you get to read it means that the pricing has usually changed, and we either receive irate e-mails from our readers complaining about the pricing being higher than what we published, or we receive complaints from the suppliers saying that our

Jump Shopping (www.jump.co.za) is South Africa's leading Shopping Comparison Search Engine. They list and group products from over 100 local online stores, so you can compare prices quickly and with ease. We recommend that you use this resource, as this is definitely one of those instances where online will be more accurate than print in terms of actual pricing on the day.





Intel Core i7 Extreme 965 Intel Corporation [011] 806-4530



MOTHERBOARD GIGABYTE EX58-Extreme



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Hardwired



by Neo Sibeko

Hardware 2009

BESIDES THE DIRE FINANCIAL situations that many of our favourite tech companies find themselves in lately, there are a few things that have taken place over the last couple of months, which are worth getting excited about. Besides the launch of the GTX295 (reviewed in this issue), AMD has been doing well on the CPU front in terms of bringing the Phenom II to the market. Not only is the CPU overclocking very well, but rumour has it that AMD is going to release CPUs at frequencies up to 3.5GHz throughout 2009. Indeed, this is still a rumour with very little reliable information, but it seems plausible enough given that the Phenom II CPUs are clocking incredibly well.

With AM3 boards already on the market, and with everyone waiting with bated breath for high clocked AM3 DDR3 CPUs, it seems right now that technically AMD are at their best (even though the company may not be doing too well financially). We are all aware of Intel's E8700 CPU (3.5GHz as well, coincidentally), but it is worth keeping in mind that as fast as this CPU will be, it is a dual-core solution and will probably retail for the same price that you can get an AMD guad-core Phenom II for.

That's just on the CPU front, but it seems that ATI and NVIDIA are locking heads again for the title of the fastest graphics card available. Rumour has it that ATI is going to release yet another dual GPU part in the Radeon 4XXX range, dubbed the 4990X2, which is based on the 40nm process and will feature GDDR5 memory operating at a toasty 4.8GHz. Undoubtedly, this part, if indeed true, will be faster than the GTX295. With that said, it remains to be seen how soon this part will be available, what its performance will be like and, most importantly, how much it will cost. What will NVIDIA pit against this graphics card, if anything at all? The GT300 is slated for much later on in 2009 with full DirectX 11 support, which should be a competitor for the dual GPU solution from ATI in the 5XXX range. This promises to be an interesting battle and each camp is rumoured to be producing some very impressive parts that promise to dwarf today's high-end products.

The best thing about all of this, however, is that the competition will not only be on the performance front, but also in price. Which is arguably becoming more important than outright performance as we can see by the growing popularity of ultra mobile PCs and other cheaper alternatives in computing as a whole.

With that said, what keeps all of our favourite companies in business is innovation and pushing the limits of what technology can deliver, and as such it's no surprise that AMD is also said to be releasing their six-core CPUs in 2009 as well, with Intel already having announced an eight-core, 24MB L3 Cache Xeon CPU (16 threads). It remains to be seen if this CPU will make it to the desktop (mainly LGA1366), but if it does, there's likely to be some changes to the CPU (for one, the quadchannel memory controller has to be dropped). However, what may be more interesting for us, the end users, is the eventual migration to the 32nm process, which should see more performance gains but even better prices (at least in theory).

Despite the current financial climate, it's good to see that there is still hardware worth getting excited about. From the recently announced 2TB hard drives to planned 320GB solid-state drives by the end of this year, it all means better systems for better prices. In terms of software, Windows 7 is shaping up to be a fantastic operating system (at least as far as performance is concerned) outpacing both Windows XP and Windows Vista in its Beta stage. Next month, look out for a performance comparison between these three operating systems. Until then, stay tuned. NAG

Despite the current financial climate, it's good to see that there is still hardware worth getting excited about.



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WAREHOUSE COMPUTERS

Reviewer's Diary



by Derrick Cramer

Oh for PoniesPoniesPonies' sake

WHAT MAKES YOUR PC stand out in the crowd? Your costly peripherals? Your goliath case towering over all who oppose you? The components that cost you almost as much as a small second-hand car? Or the 17-inch CRT that's turning a lighter shade of ugly, and has a scratch down the centre thanks to some noob? Many a gamer will pass by your setup with nothing more than a snigger at your excuse for a screen. They won't care that you can play every game on Ultra Mega Insane. They won't care that your 3D Mark score is a number longer than their keyboard, and they won't care that you can mirror YouTube on your RAID array. The bottom line is, you are out of proportion; and like a large nose, you stick out, literally.

Thankfully, most gamers never suffer from the scenario because of common sense. There's no point in overbalancing your PC with a high-end card if you still have a Celeron D powering it; and likewise, no point in getting a 1,000W PSU when you're running an 8600GT. So why is it that I'm sitting here with a PC that is the envy of many a gamer, with specs most could only dream of, linked to the aforementioned 17-inch ugly, heavy, space-consuming CRT monitor? I let things get out of hand, focused a bit too much on performance when I should've worried about comfort, turned a blind ear to the many opinions of friends, even defended my screen to the ends of LANs. It was a mistake, and boy did I realise it when my new haby arrived.

I had originally ordered myself a 24-inch LCD. Being a competitive person, I had worked my proverbial ass off to one up my friends whose parents had bought them 22-inch LCDs. Getting to the till, I had an epiphany: spend R1,800 for an extra two inches. While in some cases that would be well worth it, when it comes to screen size, two inches doesn't mean much. The 19-incher is cheap, and the 24-incher makes you drool, but 22 inches is just enough – the sweet spot in a market with a catalogue than would make the graphics card market shudder.

By now you know I bought myself a 22-inch LCD, a Samsung 2233BW to be exact. Decent contrast ratio and response time, highly recommended build quality, with just a touch of pure awesomeness – a good choice if I do say so myself. Planting this beast in place of my old 17-incher, I realised what my friends had known for so long. Gaming at a higher resolution is nice: it really allows me to see what my beast of a machine can actually put out. The size is a plus, working in Photoshop and Delphi is a dream, with multiple windows fitting perfectly on the larger display. I am less stressed when working, a happier man. Lastly, but far from least, the weight. Lifting the screen with two fingers rather than two hands makes LANning less of a hassle, and rearranging my workspace for a new desk, nothing short of a breeze.

So to end off, I should get to the nitty-gritty of the matter. I upgraded from an old, worn CRT to something better in every way. The 22-inch LCD that now resides on my desk is by far one of the best PC-related purchases I have ever made, and I wholeheartedly urge anyone who doesn't yet have one to consider putting off that new graphics card, hard drive or keyboard, and rather indulge in the comfort that is a 22-inch LCD. Oh, and don't mind the ponies thing – it seems to make some people happy, somehow.

Spending R1,800 for an extra two inches? While in some cases that would be well worth it, when it comes to screen size, two inches doesn't mean much."



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tima VII: The Black Gate. Who still remembers that one, from a long line of Origin Systems stunners, who created one of the richest, most immersive fantasy worlds ever to hit the digital screen? I remember it because I think it remains today (apart from Gran Turismo 4 maybe) the longest I have ever played a game with the objective of finishing it. I played The Black Gate for at least two months, probably closer to three, when I first got hold of it, plugging away at finishing this killer game. Then I got stuck. Hideously, impassably stuck in the frozen wastes of the North, and no matter how many times I ran around the area, I could not seem to find that missing key, or place, or monster - I forget which it was now. Probably all three.

So I stopped, and uninstalled the game, because it was a huge hard drive hog in a time of costly [for a school student at the time, even one with a paper route] storage capacity. But I kept my 'savegames', and some six or nine months later I was back. Two weeks after that, the game was finished, and I felt immensely satisfied with myself. I'm the type who, if I start something, likes to finish it...

CLUTTER

Now I was lucky. I knew the intricacies of working with a file system in DOS well enough to identify and be able to restore my savegame files. Something which many PC users still struggle with today, and admittedly game developers often seem to make this task far more complicated than it ought to be! Without this knowledge, I'd have never known why the add-on, Serpents Isle, needed to exist. It would have been a gaping hole in my adolescent life, in short – a hardcore gamer's tragedy in the making.

In fact, I still have saves for Neverwinter Nights 2 cluttering up the file structure on one of my drives, a game which I gave up on primarily because the further you progressed, the more obviously linear and repetitive the game became – fine if you're playing Diablo but less appealing if the title is meant to be a more sprawling fantasy RPG such as NWN. Like the original was. Anyway, my obsession with finishing things means that I'll likely only lose that data when the drive these saves are stored on fails, even though I'm never likely to actually use it.

But now, what's all this nostalgic rambling about old virtual quests and the data that supports this dogged determination? Apart from sparking a brief moment of recollection, it doesn't mean particularly much to you. After all, if you're a gamer (and if you're not, you're reading the wrong magazine matey), you'll have your own examples to harbour secret triumphs/regrets over anyway.

Valve Software is my point. More specifically, the digital onlinedistribution, management, and community-building platform this iconic PC games house has created with the Steam service. There's a new feature that fairly quietly launched in December, which will in time completely remove the requirement to store useless savegame data on your local machine, as well as some other minor but cool features, and a wealth of future possibilities.

Welcome, then, to Steam Cloud.

THE CLOUD

It hasn't only worked out to be a snappy name, but the cloud part relates directly to the current buzzwords in high-performance and corporate computing circles: the concept of cloud computing. The cloud, of course, refers to the Internet, or in fact any interconnected network of systems capable of passing data between one another. The Internet being the obvious household choice now that it's hit broadband performance levels.

Basically, cloud computing means that all systems connected to this network should be able to, just as an example, allow the user to log into an environment that is identical to the one they're most accustomed to, regardless of the geographical location of the machine he or she is logging in from, or even the hardware layer beneath the skin. The same applications he or she uses every day will simply be there: files and personal settings for each app - the very look and feel of the chosen desktop environment. All exactly identical, and entirely system independent as this data is all stored in the cloud, and simply served to the client upon authorisation.

Of course, this model calls for monstrous server-side processing capacities, and hence the massive acceleration of server compute density by blade server builders and those virtualisation gurus, as the operating system and all of the apps are in essence being run on the server. Just the output is relayed to the client machine, essentially rendering it something of a dumb terminal. It isn't quite the same as thin-client computing, however, as the server will pass certain calculations and duties down to the client system; but in essence, it's the server sweating, especially when you have a thousand or more users connected at the same time!

CLOUD GAMING

Steam, as it has existed until now, was the first implementation of this kind of mentality to have any meaning to the gaming world, of course. The software distribution element allows multiple installations of Steam, including the games you own under the Steam banner, on separate machines so that you can play the games you buy, whether at home, at work, or on your beach holiday in the Bahamas, presumably. Admittedly, it is a distribution platform, so you do need to download the data to each individual machine, but still, it's available for you to do just that if need be.

Not exactly the seamless integration of a corporate network then. But Steam Cloud takes it that one step further, and even if it appears to be a small step, it's an important one nonetheless. The cloud now means that user-defined game customisations – your profiles,



savegames, preferred control configurations and the like - are merely cached on your local machine. The change is effected and then uploaded to the cloud the next time Steam checks for updates. The beginnings of truly distributable data stores in gaming.

Valve launched the service with $Left\ 4\ Dead$, which is a superb and addictive little title in its own right and well worth shelling out for anyway. However, this mad zombie-fest is clearly more of a proof of concept for the cloud than any kind of stern test. Fair enough for the pilot phases we suppose, and the service basically just manages your profile and configuration customisations. These come down to tiny, text-based scripting files, which are barely a couple of kilobytes big. Still, savegames are generally a pretty manageable size themselves, so even when rolled out to more save-intensive titles such as HL2 or $Fallout\ 3$, the Steam Cloud shouldn't put precious SA broadband capacities in too much trouble.

So any progress you make is pushed automatically to all of those multiple Steam installations you had scattered around. Or in this case, your personal settings - such as your player name and key bindings - automatically become the default setup across these multiple installations, which is a small convenience but nevertheless a nice little value-add.

The bandwidth on the server side is another issue. Steam serves a substantially larger global user base than even the most gigantic corporate network, but the company maintain that the load is more than catered for with the Steam servers in their current configuration, and adds that it will naturally invest further in hardware and connectivity if future implementations of the cloud make it necessary. After all, they wouldn't want to compromise their core online gaming retail and distribution business for nice-to-have features such as Steam Cloud - so you can rest assured that they ll be monitoring and planning ahead for the anticipated loads.

While the Steam service may have its fair share of detractors, claiming reasons such as the frequent and sizeable updates required and the dodgy DRM problems that have plagued legal users purchasing a new title, its growing popularity suggests that as the future of PC gaming, Valve's Steam is looking pretty sure to play a major role.

ADDED VALUE ISN'T ALWAYS BLATANTLY NOTICEABLE

And Steam Cloud, when considering the distribution platform, retail elements, and new community enhancements, is yet another small piece of this forward-looking puzzle, which will maintain PC gaming's status in the next-generation gaming environment, capitalising on the strength of the platform – its diversity. Which is also perhaps its Achilles' heel. It's also a fine example of leveraging the power of the Internet to enhance the user experience of a title in however small a fashion.

Naturally, the cloud, just as in the corporate space, is entirely hardware independent, so your various systems will maintain their individual system settings, although the company is promising that Steam will soon be able to control the updating of your driver layer without user intervention, meaning that your driver updates will feed through Steam automatically. After all, Steam knows exactly what hardware each machine it runs on has installed, so this built-in, auto-update function makes perfect sense on the platform.

What is perhaps most impressive about Steam Cloud is that you'll barely even notice that it's there, and this is its first real-world implementation – ever. Yet, already it's so well integrated into the game, through Steam, that what it does for you just sort of happens. This provides a solid base from which Valve will be able to deliver other data-storage and in-game distribution methods, which are more complex and will become more a part of our daily gaming experience. Until we wonder how the gaming industry ever worked properly without this rich set of value-added remote storage functionality.

Sure, Steam itself has been the source of much bashing locally, but it is hardly fair to blame our infrastructure limitations on the developer of this manner of new breed of gaming platform. Steam Cloud will neither make local connectivity and, specifically, bandwidth limitations go away, and nor is it likely to consume a full 3GB ADSL account in a month all by itself. If you're a Steam user already, it isn't noticeable. Everything happens in the background and the data passing back and forth is minimal. In fact, you'll use more bandwidth playing a multiplayer title for 30 minutes, than you would playing a challenging single-player game requiring you to save every five minutes of your progress.

ZOMBIEISM IS THE DISEASE..

Our advice then: forget about it! But buy Left 4 Dead, because being one of only four humans still alive in a city crawling with a brilliantly realised zombie horde is what we, as gamers, really thrive on, isn't it? And the fact that, even should you lose a drive and all the data stored on it, you'll be able to restore your game entirely (including all personal settings and customisations) simply by connecting to and capitalising on the Steam service, is certainly nice, and you'll agree if you ever need this functionality.

Until then, never having to concern yourself with finding and copying crucial savegame files again is enough to relieve a minute amount of stress from my ending-obsessed gaming experience. Which is always good, as gaming on the PC needs to be as stress free as possible for it to continue to be strong against the user-friendly, community-enhanced marketplace of the current generation consoles. NAG

Russell Bennett

087 N



F YOU'RE LOOKING AT upgrading to an i7-based system, but find that the average motherboard is too expensive, then the UD4P may be worth considering. Indeed, it is by no means a cheap motherboard, but is definitely more affordable than the UD5P or the EXTREME, which can cost anything up to R6 000.

The UD4P is based on the X58 chipset (as the name suggests), and is essentially an EX58-EXTREME - but with a few differences (making the motherboard more affordable without sacrificing too much in terms of features). This is particularly important because in terms of performance, the motherboards are exactly the same. So, if you want performance and not the extra bells and whistles that GIGABYTE includes with its products, then the UD4P makes even more sense.

It features the same blue-and-white colour scheme as the EXTREME, but not the elaborate land no doubt costly) cooling system, which will not be missed by many people who are not into extreme overclocking or who don't particularly like the unusually large cooler on the EXTREME. The UD4P features a cooling system very similar to the one on the EP45-UD3P, which we reviewed previously.

The UD4P, as stated previously, performs exactly the same as the EXTREME. If you are pushing for overclocking records and HWB0T points, you may want to consider the EXTREME, but the difference between the UD4P and

the EXTREME is likely to be irrelevant to most people. The motherboard supports eight SATA 3Gb/sec drives instead of ten, and has no POST LED. Other than that, however, the board is an exact replica of the EXTREME. It supports three-way SLI, CrossFireX and has the same ALC889A audio-controller chip, which supports Dolby Digital surround sound.

This means that for much cheaper you are able to reach almost the same levels of performance on the UD4P as you would on the EX58-EXTREME (in terms of frequency). Using an Intel 940 CPU, we were able to run a stable 200MHz BCLK (Bus Clock) for a 4GHz overclock, but anything past 200MHz proved to be unstable. Interestingly enough, the EX58-EXTREME was able to reach a maximum stable speed of 215MHz. This difference could come down to different BIOS revisions and not the actual motherboard quality.

When we swapped the 940 for a 920, the UD4P proved to be a better motherboard, as it ran stable at 4GHz (eight threads) - which the EXTREME could not. This, we suspect, is a BIOS-related issue, but it's still excellent for the UD4P (given that it is supposed to be the less capable board).

One aspect of the motherboard that we did not particularly like is the small Southbridge heat sink, which retained massive amounts of heat - it was even worse when running CrossFire and SLI. It was never hot enough to make the system



unstable, but we can't help but think that a better Southbridge may have helped us reach the same 215MHz BCLK that we had managed on the EXTREME.

Overall, the UD4P is a solid motherboard that cannot really be faulted on anything. Right now, it's still early days for the LGA1366 platform, and we don't doubt that overclocking will improve on most X58 boards as the CPU revisions improve as well. As it stands, however, if you are looking for an affordable way to upgrade to the i7 platform without paying a fortune, the UD4P is likely the board for you. It is not the cheapest; but then again, it is based on one of the best X58 boards on the market.

Neo Sibeko

| SPECS | |
|-----------------|---|
| CHIPSET | Intel X5 + ICH10 |
| MEMORY BANKS | 6 x DDR3 184-pin (Max. 6 x 2GB) |
| CPU SUPPORT | Intel Core i7, i7 Extreme |
| SLOTS | 3 x PCI-E 16x, PCI-E 4x, 2 x PCI 2.2 |
| SCORE A | A A A |
| | |

RAIDMAX ICEBERG

RRP→ R2,299 | Supplier→ Raidmax | Website→ www.raidmax.co.za | Brand→ Raidmax

AIDMAX IS KNOWN FOR its relatively wild, if not interestingly designed cases, which primarily cater for the more excitable gamer. So, when we heard that we'd be receiving the Iceberg, we were expecting an interesting-looking case (as is almost always the case with Raidmax).

Unpacking the unit, we were pleasantly surprised to find that not only is the Iceberg toned down as far as its visual appeal is concerned, but the finish of the case is incredible. There are no sharp edges to speak of on the case. The paint job is immaculate, and all the panels fit together snugly. The side panels are on a spring mechanism, and pressing the levers used to open the panels feels solid and sturdy.

The case comes standard with four 120mm fans, two extraction fans at the top



of the case, one rear fan, and one on the front. This is more than enough for most users, but a side fan, located where the VGA been appreciated. Nevertheless, overall system temperatures too much. The rear of the case features two rubberised cut-outs for the tubing of water-cooling kits (like most modern mid- to high-end chassis). Overall. the Iceberg is more about functionality than style. It's unfortunate that the case will not fit an EATX motherboard, which means owners of Skulltrail and Quad-FX platforms will need to the majority of users the Iceberg is more than enough.

There aren't any real complaints one can level at this case, as it's solidly built and has a very high-quality finish. Those looking at installing an internal water-cooling system with multiple loops and such may want to look for a bigger case, but for everyone else this is a solid chassis that has everything a modern case should have. NAG

Neo Sibeko



THE PATRIOT WARP 64GB V.2 SSD

TSEEMS THAT EVERY memory vendor out there these days has taken to SSDs, and it's not surprising given that they were already selling USB flash drives. While the technology cannot be said to be exactly the same, its right up their alley and it only makes sense that they get into the market early, because it will not be too many years before SSDs are the primary means of storage for most people.

While 64GB of storage cannot be said to be plentiful, particularly when one is able to buy a USB flash drive of the same capacity for around the same price, an SSD is incredibly fast. In fact, the Patriot Warp is second only to the Intel X-25M The access times, much like all SSDs, are not worth mentioning because they are nonexistent. Only the read and write rates are important, and in this regard the Warp drive delivers. Read speeds were a little inconsistent for some reason. fluctuating between 131MB/sec and 110MB/sec systematically according to HDTACH. SiSoftware Sandra 2009 SP2 also reported similar figures and read speed patterns.

Write speeds were between 67 and 75MB/sec, which is a little slower than what the X-25M is capable of. This particular model is part of the V.2 range and uses MLC

NAND memory - the V.3 series has capacities of up to 256GB and better performance for those who need the additional space. However, at the current pricing, only the well-heeled will be looking at that series.

RRP→ TBA | Supplier→ Syntech | Website→ www.syntechsa.co.za | Brand→ Patriot

As with all SSDs, wear is something that is always a concern. but do not be deterred: this drive features wearlevelling technology so that data is written and read in an even and uniform manner This minimises wear on specific cells that may end up failing quicker than the rest of the drive. With this technology and a 1.5-million hour MTBF figure, you can rest assured that your data will be secure for years on end. The Patriot Warp 64GB V.2 SSD is an excellent drive. It's a pity about the storage capacity, applications and the operating system, it is more than adequate. NAG Neo Sibeko





ASUS GEFORCE ENGTX295

2008 WAS ONE OF the toughest years for the two chief GPU manufacturers in the world. While market share improved for ATI with the economic situation such as it was land still is), both NVIDIA and ATI suffered significant losses in revenue. However, that has not stopped the competition between the two companies.

After ATI released the 4870X2, a response from NVIDIA seemed to take an eternity, but understandably so as their premium GPU, the GT200, was still based on the older 65nm process, which made a GX2-like successor costly to manufacture. NVIDIA's transition to the 55nm process, while somewhat late compared to ATI, was expected (traditionally NVIDIA has always been two to six months behind in process-node manufacturing). But with the change, we received two brand new products in the form of the GTX285 and more importantly, the newest and fastest graphics card available on the market, the GTX295 - which we have here.

Before we go into performance analysis, here's the run-down on the GPU and what it is all about. NVIDIA, as usual, chose to go with a dual PCB approach, as they have been since the first 7950GX2 card a few years ago. However, we suspect the bridge chip has been updated to allow better communications between the GPUs over the years. The cooling mechanism on the GTX295 is definitely the best NVIDIA has ever come up with. The card remains not only cooler than the 4870X2, but noise, even with the fan at full tilt, is significantly lower. For those who care about such things, the card actually looks good - or at least as aesthetically pleasing as a rectangular

plastic shroud can be. ASUS's artwork helps things along as well: while we are sure that the TOP edition will feature even more dramatic artwork, it's the performance and practicality we are concerned about.

The GTX295 features two GT200b GPUs, which are a hybrid of the GT200 cores that were featured on the original GTX280 and GTX260. The difference here is that each individual GPU features 240 stream processors, but only a 448-bit memory bus (64 x 7), which is understandable from both a financial and performance point of view. A 512-bit bus would have escalated costs (hence making it far more expensive than the stipulated \$499 MSRP), and the performance gains would probably be negligible, or at least not significant enough to justify the increase in manufacturing costs.

This configuration is actually a blessing, because the GTX295 is measurably faster than the 4870X2. The numbers suggest that NVIDIA's 480 combined stream processors will not be a match for ATI's 1,600 on the 4870X2, and in theory this is true. However, in practice it is the exact opposite. Comparing the two cards based on all the gaming benches we subjected them to, the GTX295 came out the better card at every single setting and resolution, only succumbing to the 4870X2 at 2,560 x 1,360 with 8X AA enabled - and that is purely because of the larger frame buffer on the 4870X2. For the most part, however, the GTX295 is the better part without question.

In terms of synthetic tests, 3DMark Vantage was one benchmark where the GTX295 was considerably faster than the



4870X2, with the difference almost 3,000 points in favour of the GTX295. This result was with GPU PhysX disabled, as the 4870X2 doesn't support GPU physics through the PhysX API at present.

The present situation with hardware-accelerated physics support brings about another great feature of the GTX295 and current NVIDIA solutions. The video encoding with Badaboom v1.1, while not better than many of the more established freeware encoders available, is vastly superior to any solution offered by the competition. The encoding speed is fast and the quality is good. As an overall package and experience, the GTX295 scores a perfect five out of five.

The GTX295 is not only the fastest graphics card money can buy currently, but in an SLI configuration, it offers the fastest graphics solution available today. The ASUS ENGTX295 is probably the best VGA card we have ever had the pleasure of using. NAG

Neo Sibeko



GENIUS HS-05A HEADPHONES

RRP→ R159 | Supplier→ TVR Computers Website→ www.tvr.co.za | Brand→ Genius

A S GAMERS, WE ARE so used to inflated hardware prices that it is a refreshing change to find a product that delivers good comfort and performance, while still coming in at an affordable price point. Such is the case with these stereo headphones. Don't let the price tag put you off: these 'phones offer very good value for money, overall. For starters, the ear pads are comfortable ones that cup your ears, rather than 'sit' on your ears, making for good comfort, as well as good sound containment. The 'headband'

SPECS

EAR PAD 90mm oval, leather

CABLE LENGTH 1.8m (see review)

SENSITIVITY 102dB+/-3dB

FREQUENCY 20Hz - 20kHz

IMPEDANCE 32 ohms

SCORE

part also has a cushion. There is a boom-mounted microphone on the left, which can swing down into position, or be swivelled out of the way when not needed. Overall, the construction is comfortable, if a bit 'plasticky' and light – but then again, low weight is actually an advantage if you are going to be wearing these for hours on end while moving your head.

My one criticism has to do with the cable. Most of it is rolled up in the same way as a telephone handset, meaning that it can stretch. However, while this does help to keep it relatively tidy. it effectively renders the reach quite short, as you really don't want to stretch it, because that would put undue strain on the connector jacks. However, if you sit quite connect headphones to your front panel, this should not be an issue. On the upside, the cable has an in-line volume control, as well as a microphone on/off switch (important, given that when you are not using the mic, you don't want the superfluous hiss messing with your sound

Of course, in a device like this, sound reproduction quality is crucial. The HS-05A headphones deliver very solid sound, and

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while the quality is certainly less than

what you would get from a pair costing you

R2,000, this difference is surprisingly small.

Alex Jelagin

GENIUS NAVIGATOR 365 LASER

RRP→ R249 | Supplier→ Axiz | Website→ www.axiz.co.za | Brand→ Genius

REN'T CONVERTIBLES GREAT? WHEN the sun is shining, you can drive around with the top down and enjoy the air, but when it rains, you need merely raise the top and you are kept dry. It's almost like having a sedan and a motorcycle... almost. And so it is with some products that offer two modes of use. This device can be a mouse or a gamepad as needed – well, almost. As is so often the case with items that are meant to be versatile and flexible, they do what they do adequately, but don't excel in any particular aspect in the way that a dedicated device can. When 'folded up', the Navigator 365 is a small mouse that may find favour with notebook users, though it's certainly not comparable



'opened', it turns into
a game controller a bit
more functional than that of a Super NES,
but below par compared to modern console
controllers. Let's take a look at each mode.

In mouse mode, you would use the Navigator with your fingertips, rather than nestling the mouse in your palm. It acts as a five-button mouse with a scroll wheel, so in this regard it is pretty much 'full house'. However, the side buttons are located too far toward the rear end of the mouse. This is because they double as shoulder buttons when in gamepad mode. The mouse sensitivity can be switched between 800 and 1,600dpi on the fly by holding down the three main buttons simultaneously – not the most comfortable, but at least the option is there.

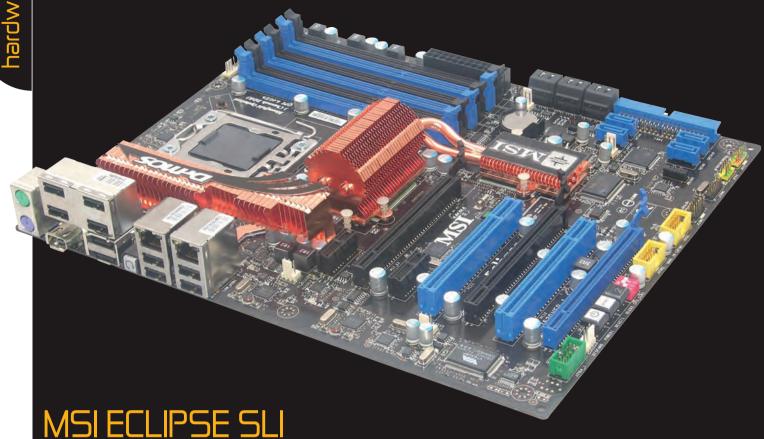
In gamepad mode, you get a four-way D-pad at the left and six buttons at the right, plus shoulder buttons and a couple of function
buttons on the left. The
action of the buttons is
positive and responsive,
but the lack of any sort of
analogue control, or at the
very least an eight-way D-pad,

is disappointing. Games recognise the Navigator as a standard game controller, as does Windows Vista.

Even the bass is respectable, and these phones deliver a good frequency response

The software that ships with this device is somewhat disappointing. The gamepad buttons cannot be remapped to keystrokes – in fact, there are no gamepad configuration settings at all. On the mouse side, there are controls that correspond identically to those provided by Windows. Overall, this is a novel device, but one that has limited appeal. Its diminutive size means that it will appeal to notebook-using gamers who don't want to lug around multiple peripherals, but desktop users will probably look elsewhere. A carry pouch further enhances portable appeal.

Alex Jelagin



HERE'S NO QUESTION ABOUT it: MSI has some way to go before it can establish itself as a true challenger to the Striker, EXTREME and Quantum Force boards, which are often regarded as the boards to buy when looking for ultimate performance and features.

MSI was not only the first manufacturer to announce an X58 board, but they released a fantastic motherboard, which, for some reason, was overlooked by many enthusiasts. Not because it did not deliver, but simply because many had stopped looking in MSI's direction for a motherboard of this calibre.

The Eclipse SLI motherboard, as do other high-end X58-based motherboards, supports three-way SLI and CrossFireX. The Eclipse sets itself apart, however, with a few innovative technologies that help sell the board to not only enthusiasts, but gamers and just about anybody else who is interested in building a powerful machine. With the usual X58 technologies, MSI seems to have finally heard the voices of users, and decided to work extensively on their overclocking 'Cell' menu.

It is not as comprehensive as the menu you will find on a Striker, UD5P or Blood Rage board, but has all the options to satisfy most users - from the beginner overclocker to the extreme user. One unique feature, which is a dream come true for enthusiasts, is the ability to use a BIOS update without actually flashing the system BIOS. You are able to load a BIOS image on a flash drive and boot up using the flash drive. This is particularly useful for power users who will go through

several BIOS revisions trying to find the best one for overclocking and stability. This feature is also better than the multiple BIOS chips that other manufacturers use for redundancy. The reason? Sometimes both BIOS chips are corrupted and more often needs to be sent back to the manufacturer for repairs or replacements - a lengthy and sometimes costly exercise.

More than the above, however, while other manufacturers do their bit for green computing, MSI takes it a step further with a custom PSU connector that allows the system to regulate power draw, therefore substantially reducing power consumption. saving modes on the Core i7 platform, the MSI Eclipse is without a doubt the most power-efficient X58 motherboard around.

are only concerned with performance, then you'll be pleased to know that the Eclipse SLI is a performer of note. The best part easy to overclock. Reaching a 200MHz BCLK was easier than on any other motherboard we have ever tested. All it took on the Core i7 920 CPU was increasing the clock speed from 133MHz to 200MHz, adding +0.100 to the QPI/VTT voltage and turning off Intel's Turbo Boost technology. This allowed the system to boot into Windows at 4GHz without problem. 3DMark was problematic CPU voltage sorted it out, and the system was rock solid through numerous runs of 3DMark Vantage and WPrime 1024.

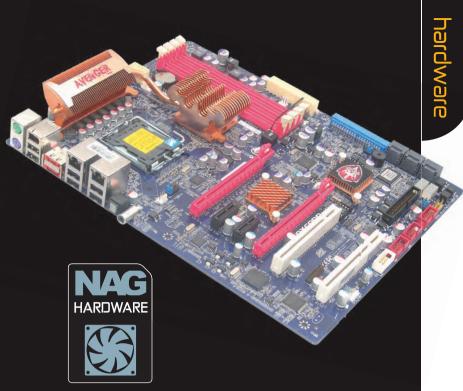


The maximum speed we reached using this motherboard was 210MHz - which was very stable (211MHz failed to POST). This, as with many X58 boards, is largely BIOS related more than anything else, but any X58 board that passes a 200MHz BCLK is considered good, as almost all boards stop being stable at around this speed.

In terms of features, MSI did not include a three-way SLI connector with the sample we had, which was disappointing, but two very long, flexible CrossFire connectors were included (which are better than the shorter cables that others insist on packaging with their products). The MSI Eclipse SLI is without a doubt the best motherboard in the top three X58 boards available on the market today. NAG

Neo Sibeko

| SPEC! | 5 | |
|-----------------|------|---|
| CHIPSET | г | Intel X58 + ICH10 |
| MEMORY BANKS | 1 | 6 x DDR3 184-pin (Max. 6 x 2GB) |
| CPU SUF | PORT | Intel Core i7, i7 Extreme |
| SLOTS | | 3 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2 |
| SCOR! | E | |
| | | |



FOXCONN QUANTUM FORCE P45 AVENGER

OXCONN'S QUANTUM FORCE DIVISION

is synonymous with overclocking for producing some truly unique and incredible motherboards that smash world records and raise the bar all the time. So, just by looking at the Avenger, you are able to tell that it is without a doubt one serious enthusiast-grade motherboard.

More than looks, however, it is what it is capable of that makes it amazing. Its biggest selling point is that the board features two full 16-lane PCI Express 2.0 slots through a secondary switch chip, as the P45 doesn't have enough lanes for this functionality. More than PCI Express lanes, however, Foxconn has gone with DDR3 support instead of DDR2 - clearly aiming to make the Avenger the best P45 motherboard around ever. The Avenger board is truly something phenomenal. The

| SPECS | |
|-----------------|---|
| CHIPSET | Intel P45 + ICH10 |
| MEMORY BANKS | 4 x DDR3 184-pin (Max. 4 x 2GB) |
| CPU SUPPORT | Intel Core 2 / Core 2 Extreme |
| SLOTS | 2 x PCI-E 16x, 2 x PCI-E 1x, 2 x PCI 2.2 |
| SCORE | |
| | |
| | |

Northbridge is located between the RAM slots and the CPU socket, making for an interesting layout that some may not like, but it works well for enthusiasts (who this motherboard is ultimately aimed at)

We suspect that the Northbridge placement gives the motherboard a slight edge over others in performance, as memory performance is particularly impressive. RAM overclocking is also good, with our set managing a solid 2,000MHz CL7 at 2.20V. But FSB overclocking was as expected, with the system reaching a respectable 600MHz with nothing but the supplied fan. Under liquid nitrogen, we are sure the FSB would increase by a good 20 to 40MHz depending on the CPU. However, it is worth noting that the Avenger literately brings together the best parts of the X48 and P45 chipsets, as high FSB frequencies, dual fullspeed PCI Express lanes and DDR3 support are only available on one other motherboard, which is based on the more expensive X48 chipset.

The Avenger board is appropriately named it seems, as the previous P45 board (Blood Iron) was good but possibly not the best-received board from the company. We just wonder, though, if it's worth releasing such a motherboard when the focus seems to be on the i7 and the Phenom II motherboards. If we overlook the board's peculiar time of release, though, the Avenger is unquestionably the best P45 motherboard ever produced. NAG

Neo Sibeko



RRP-> TBA | Supplier-> Foxconn | Website-> www.quantum-force.net

| **Brand→** Foxconr

DARK AVENGERS #1

Format: Comic Series Publisher: Marvel Writer: Brian Michael Bendis

Artist: Mike Deodato Price: R46.95

HE VICTORY OF THE world's greatest heroes over the army of invading skrulls saw a few changes in the world (see Secret Invasion TP). Tony Stark is out, S.H.I.E.L.D. has been disbanded, and former super villain Norman Osborn (a.k.a. The Green Goblin) has been handed the job of reforming the National

Defense agency, and managing the Avengers. But can Osborn be trusted, or has he only pulled the wool over the eyes of the American people? Some are convinced that he has changed, others still need convincing, and there are those who will fight against him with every breath they still breathe. But to the exuberant and expectant population of America, and possibly the whole world, the revealing of Osborn's new team of Avengers is a monumental and exciting event that spells a new beginning for their world - as well as a new beginning for the Marvel Universe...







Artist: Robert Atkins

Price: R50.95

ORKING WITH THE TEAMS involved in the original G. I. Joe comics, writer Chuck Dixon kicks off the new series with a polished-looking, fresh new story and a feel that is more relevant for today, but

keeps true to the original characters and basic plot. The pages are nicely illustrated, with a clean vibrant look, which captures the Joe legacy masterfully. IDW also plans some new

innovations to the way the story unfolds, by mainlining both a G. I. Joe comic series, as well as a Cobra series that will be told more from their point of view, and also throwing in the occasional mini-series to tie the comics together. So, whether you're an old fan looking to take a nostalgic walk down memory lane, or a new reader looking for an explosive action title, maybe this one is for you.

Clive Burmeister





BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: PANEL TO PANEL

Format: Graphic novel Publisher: Dark Horse Books

Writers: Scott Allie Artists: Various Price: R195

T'S NO SECRET THAT Buffy creator Joss Whedon is

as comfortable behind the pages of a comic book as he is behind a whirring camera. His hit TV series, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and its popular spin-off, Angel, have spawned their share of devout followers, but many may have missed their excellent and often experimental comic adaptations. If that's the case, this could well be the book to set things right.

Following the story of the Buffy comic series, from conception to where it left its parallelism to the show (and continued on to season eight), Panel to Panel covers the major and more interesting minor developments during the comic's evolution. No matter if you're just into comics for the artwork or are a long-time Buffy fanatic, this book has something for you. Great drawings and concept work, behind-the-scenes tidbits and more will get you to your local comic shop looking for the books Panel to Panel discusses.







IMPALER #1

Format: Comic Series Publisher: Top Cow (Image) Writer: William Harms Artists: Matt Timson Price: R35.50

HE NEW SERIES OF Impaler kicks off after the events of the previous tale (collected in the Impaler Vol. 1 Trade Paperback). When millions of vampires invade America, the US government, in a last-ditch effort to salvage the situation, decide to nuke New York City. It doesn't help. The fight

for humankind's survival is led by a vampire hunter with supernatural abilities, named Vlad the Impaler, and a few humans caught in the devastation that surrounds them. Impaler is a fast-paced and hard-hitting story, with graphic and gory violence, as well as adrenaline-pumping action sequences, all put together in a superbly written and illustrated comic book. The book really captures the feel of a world teetering on the knife-edge of oblivion, the desperation of the struggle and chaos that engulfs the characters, and the gruesomeness of the evil creatures, which spill out of its pages. If you're not already on your way out to pick up a copy, it must be because you bought two copies yesterday.

Clive Burmeister



NOBLE CAUSES <mark>/OL. 1 -</mark> IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Format: Graphic Novel Publisher: Image Writer: Jay Faerber Artist: Various Price: R149.95

OBLE CAUSES IS A roller-coaster ride of soap opera-style intrigue, drama, play-acting,

intense emotions, killer-instinct plot twists, and clean-cut, heart-pumping mega comic action. In Volume 1: In Sickness and in Health, we meet the world-famous superhero family known as the Nobles, and are introduced to some of the darker secrets and more sinister plots that surround this mediahyped group. When Race Noble, the heartthrob son of the Noble family, known for his super speed and heroic courage, becomes engaged to, and then marries Liz Donnelly, a regular human being, chaos begins to engulf the family and splinters their relationships. When some unknown assailant starts to stalk the Noble family members, attacking from the shadows and leaving no trace, 'blood runs high' among the heroes and animosity threatens to overwhelm them all. Noble Causes is a gripping read and a book that is hard to categorise according to a specific genre. In short, it's fantastic

Clive Burmeister



DEAD SPACE

Format: Graphic Novel Publisher: Image Writer: Antony Johnston Artist: Ben Templesmith

Price: R285

F YOU ENJOYED DEAD Space as much as I did and have become as infatuated with everything related to the franchise as I have, you're likely to raise an eyebrow at this graphic novel. It tells essentially the same tale that was told in the animated comic that we had on our cover DVD a while back. Johnston's

(who previously worked on the comic series Wasteland, among other works) writing and Templesmith's (who previously worked on titles such as Warren Ellis's Fell) gritty and unconventional art style blend together to recount the events that took place on the mining colony of Aegis VII - the doomed location near which an outbreak of violence and screaming occurred. (Go play the game if you feel the need to understand this anti-spoiler attempt). The story itself is compelling and it's interesting to be told the story of the ill-fated USG Ishimura from a new perspective: that of the colonists who were handed the short end of the stick when things started going south. A recommended read if you simply must have more Dead Space. As an added extra, character bios and artwork from the game are included.

Dane Remendes







NAG

ELFENLAND

IN ELFENLAND, YOUNG ELVES must pass

a very special test to be accepted as grown-ups. All young elves receive a map of Elfenland, and they try to visit all the towns in Elfenland, using the common types of transportation: dragons, unicorns, giant pigs, elfcycles, troll wagons, magic clouds, ferries and rafts... The one to visit the most towns wins the game!" This is what is on the back of the box, and made me think, "Oh, boy! This game is for kids... *groan*" Upon opening the box, I found six wooden boots (which are used to indicate the players), three packs of cards, assorted cardboard tokens, as well as a map board and, of course, a rulebook. The rulebook is very, very thin, which initially reinforced my opinion of an infantile game, but at least it wouldn't take long to get through it, I

Once stuck into the rules, I realised that I hadn't been doing the game justice. The rulebook is short and concise for a reason: the rules are not excessively complex, and yet there is a surprising degree of subtlety

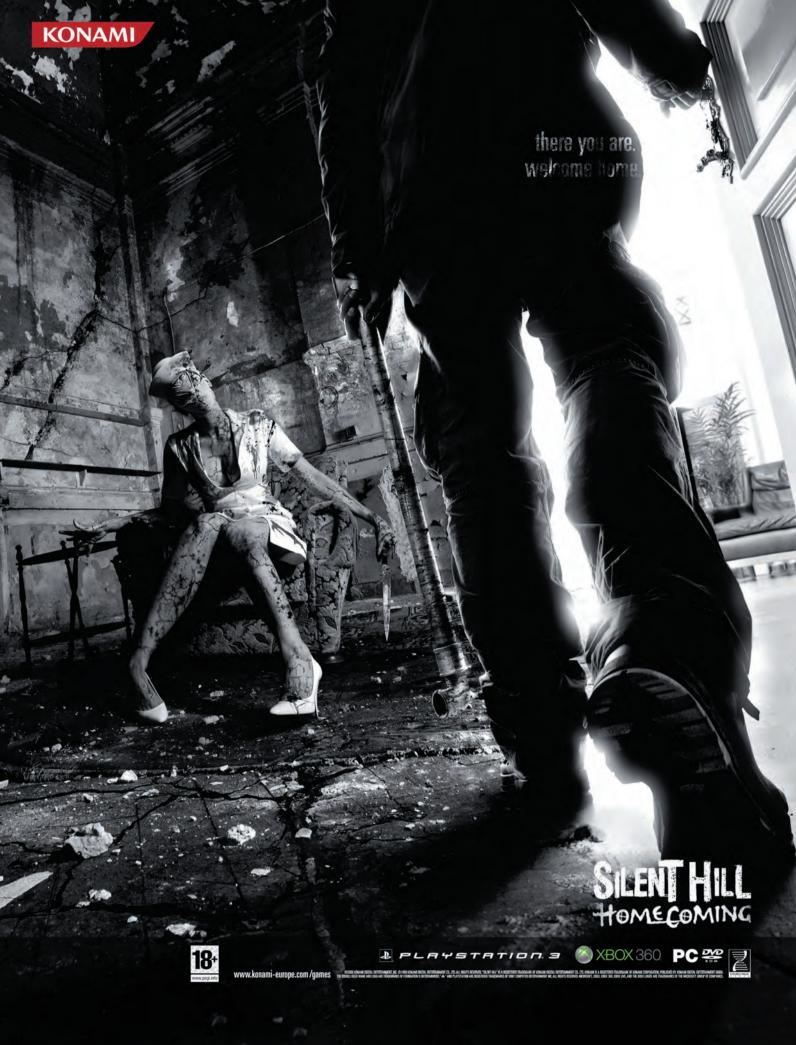
to playing this game. The object of the game (as evident above) is to become the best travelled, and this is accomplished by a combination of cards and tokens, as well as the varying terrain types across the map. Different transportation means can either traverse or not traverse various regions, and in some cases traverse with difficulty, requiring a greater expenditure of the appropriate resource (travel card). Here, there is an interesting and subtle factor at play: each player has several travel cards, some of which are face up, and some face down. This means that players have a combination of visible and hidden information to act on, which often results in the most interesting of games. There is also a combination of competitive and cooperative play: in order to get somewhere, you will have to lay down transportation routes, but once these are down, any player may use them – so you must think carefully how you will help yourself the most while not helping others too much, based on the visible information that is available.

Other than the laying of routes, there is little in the way of players affecting each other. Each player may, once in a game, place an obstacle across a route, to impede another player's progress; but other than that, it is pretty much a race. Despite my initial preconceptions based on a superficial first impression, I found that this game is quite fun, especially because of its relatively simple rule set, which makes it more accessible – you won't need to get other players to take the rulebook home for a night's study just in order to play! It's just too bad that an alternative map is not offered on the board's reverse side, as we have seen in a couple of previous games. As is the case with all Rio Grande board games, the quality of the pieces is excellent, with the construction eschewing plastic pieces in favour of painted wood. Even the cardboard bits (the tokens and the cards) impress with a sense of durability.

Alex Jelagin

Elfenland **Bottom Line** Elfenland is a great choice for players who are look ing for a game not centred on a war-like, violent 097





GIGABYTE

GIGABYTE Ultra Durable™3 Motherboards



Unique Technology from GIGABYTE DURable 2 OZ Copper PCB Japanese Solid Capacitor



Lower Ros(on) MOSFET Ferrite Core Choke



1 oz

Ultra Durable3 vs Traditional Motherboard Temp. 000





Ultra Durable **Ultra Power Efficient**











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